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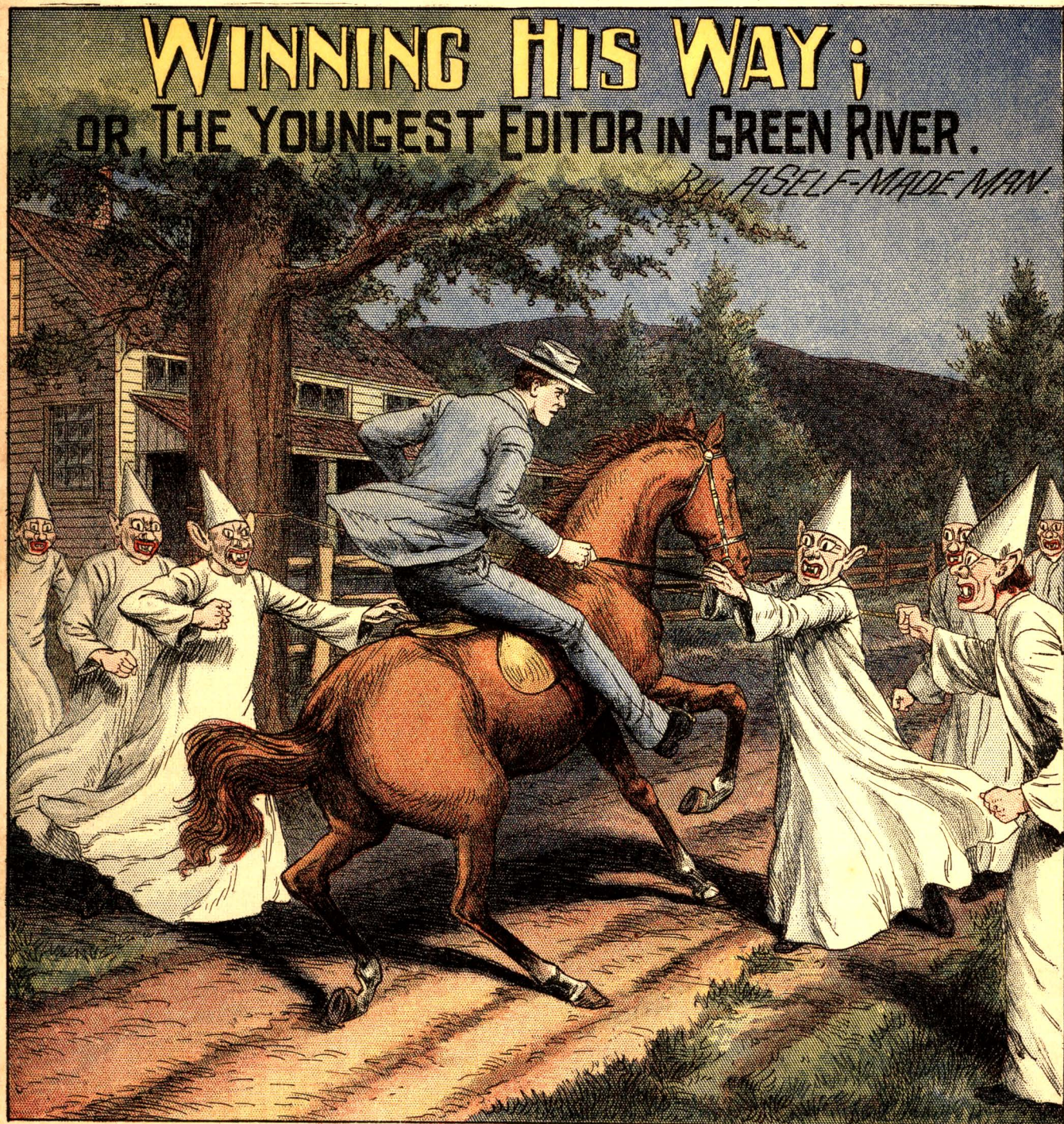
5 CENTS.

FAME AND FORTUNE WEEKLY.

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.

WINNING HIS WAY; OR, THE YOUNGEST EDITOR IN GREEN RIVER.

By A SELF-MADE MAN.



Then the concealed "Ghosts" rushed out from either side of the road and seized both horse and rider. This was no joke, and Frank put up a lusty resistance, striking out with both of his fists. One blow took Edwards in the eye.

Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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No. 7

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WINNING HIS WAY;

OR,

The Youngest Editor in Green River.

By A SELF-MADE MAN.

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH FRANK MORRIS BECOMES THE YOUNGEST EDITOR
IN GREEN RIVER.

"I know you are bright and ambitious, Frank; but——" and Mrs. Morris looked lovingly, but somewhat doubtfully, at the eager face of the handsome, manly boy who sat facing her in the bay window of their pretty Queen Anne cottage overlooking a reach of the Green River in the suburbs of the thrifty town of the same name.

"I feel sure, mother, I can make the paper pay," replied the boy, confidently. "Father gave me a good education at the grammar and high schools here, and had he lived I was to have attended the Michigan College, beginning with this fall. But that is out of the question now. I have acquired considerable insight into the management of the Argus, for, of course, father intended that eventually I should succeed him, and I would have learned much more but for father's long illness, for Mr. Jebb, whom he hired to run the paper, has persistently refused to allow me to lend a helping hand."

"But, my son, Mr. Jebb, who is an experienced newspaper man, says that it will take quite a bit of money to put the Argus on its feet again, and since your father has left us little more than this cottage, on which there is still a balance due on the mortgage, he advises me by all means to

accept Squire Roach's offer of eight hundred dollars for the paper."

"Eight hundred dollars!" exclaimed Frank Morris, indignantly. "Why, mother, that is sheer robbery! Father paid over \$2,000 for the Argus years ago when Green River was a mere village—now it is a thriving town of over 20,000 inhabitants."

"I know, Frank; but the Argus isn't what it was when your father was able to look after its interests."

"I know it isn't, mother. It has gone steadily backward since father got Mr. Jebb to run it for him. He may be an experienced newspaper man, but he hasn't given much evidence of the fact since he took charge of the paper."

"I do not remember ever hearing your father say that Mr. Jebb was not competent."

"I don't believe father knew the true state of affairs. Several times when I wanted to call his attention to matters connected with the paper which I felt sure he would not approve of—especially when Dan Harwood, our best compositor and local reporter, was summarily discharged by Mr. Jebb for no good reason that I could understand—you headed me off, because the doctor said father ought not to be worried by business matters."

"I did what I thought was best," said Mrs. Morris, beginning to cry again as thoughts of her dead husband, who

had been a kind and generous protector, forced themselves on her mind.

"I'm not blaming you, mother, dear," said the boy, getting up and putting his arm around her neck in sympathetic tenderness. "But the fact remains that Mr. Jebb has simply run the Argus into the ground. Before he came here the paper, I've heard father say, paid handsomely. Look at it now. It has dwindled in circulation and reputation under his management. We have lost our best advertising patronage, as well as a large part of our job printing. And now Mr. Jebb advises you to sell the Argus to Squire Roach for \$800, just the amount of the balance we owe him on the mortgage which he holds on this cottage, and which will run out on the first of next year. Mother, I don't like the look of things. I have often thought our editor was on uncommonly familiar terms with the squire, who is no particular friend of ours, you have always said."

"Squire Roach is a proud man, and being accounted rich, he and Mrs. Roach never quite considered your father and myself on the same level with themselves."

"And Duncan Roach, their son, seems to have copied after his parents, for he never regarded me as good enough to be decently familiar with. I've had the satisfaction, however, of keeping ahead of him at school. I've beaten him out at all the sports in which we both took part, and," with a grim smile, "I gave him a good thrashing two months ago for persistently annoying Elsie Gray, Farmer Gray's daughter."

"I'm sorry you fought with him, Frank. I told you at the time I feared you had made an enemy of him."

"I don't think I shall lose any sleep over that fact, mother. He never was a friend of mine. He always seemed to hate me because I did things better than he could do. He's about as mean a fellow as I have ever heard about, for all his wealthy prospects and position in Green River. He isn't particularly popular among the boys. The few who do toady to him have a purpose in view, I'll bet. His own particular set feel they are just as good or better than he, and they don't take their hats off to him worth a cent."

"To return to the subject of the Argus, my son, I must decide now what is best for me to do. Considering the present reduced income of the paper, I do not see that I can afford to keep Mr. Jebb at the salary he is receiving."

"I should say not," said her son, decidedly.

"If he goes I must either sell the paper or——"

"Let me run it for you, mother."

"I'm afraid the responsibility would be too great for you, Frank."

"Why do you say that? I must make a living for us both at something—why not with this paper? I now stand in my father's place towards you—your protector and provider—and I will do my duty toward you, mother, if I live."

"My dear, generous-hearted boy!" sobbed the sweet, gentle widow, whose life companion, Reginald Morris, had been laid to rest in the cemetery of Green River but a week before.

"Let me at least try, mother. If I should fail—and I

don't recognize the word—it will not be for want of confidence and hard work. I may be only a boy, but the boy of to-day is in many ways smarter and more up-to-date than the boy of twenty years ago. We are better equipped by education and observation to tackle the stern realities of life: At any rate, I feel as if I could do as well as most men under the same circumstances. I do not claim to know it all; but I have the will to succeed—the capacity for hard work, which a writer once said was the real essence of genius. I am open to conviction. I have ideas. There is no good reason why I should not be able to recover lost ground and place the Argus not only where it was when father was taken sick, but several notches higher. I only ask for the chance to show what I can do, mother, for your sake as well as my own."

"But I cannot spare you any money to speak of, Frank," she said, anxiously.

"I do not ask you for a dollar, mother."

"But Mr. Jebb told me——"

"Never mind what Mr. Jebb said. I am satisfied he is capable of saying a good many things not to your advantage. I don't believe his advice to sell the Argus to Squire Roach was disinterested. It is reasonable to suppose that having squeezed us dry, as he thinks, he would be able to get employment under the squire, who is not himself a newspaper man, and would have to employ a managing editor to run his paper. I guess Mr. Jebb knows what he is doing, and with the squire at hand to watch him his methods would probably be different to what they have been with us. Therefore, mother, with your permission, we will let Mr. Jebb return to Chicago, whence he came."

"But, Frank, you will have Mr. Robinson, the reporter and sub-editor, to pay; also Mr. Billings, the foreman, as well as young Miggles, the girls, and Gibson, the pressman."

"Mother, the working force of the Argus will be reorganized if I take hold of the paper. Mr. Robinson and Mr. Billings will have to go. When father was in harness, Dan Harwood filled the places of both these people, and did the work much better, though it is quite true Dan labored more hours; but he was faithful to my father, and his discharge was brought about simply to provide two friends of Mr. Jebb with jobs. I told you at the time that Mr. Jebb wasn't doing the right thing by father, but you did not seem to be able to get the fact through your head."

"I spoke to Mr. Jebb about it," protested the little woman.

"And of course he told you that he knew his business."

"Yes, he did say something of that kind."

"And of course you permitted him to have his own way."

"What could I do? Your father was so sick that I did not dare speak to him on the subject."

"All right, mother. You did the best you could. I am going to see if I can do better, that's all."

"But young Harwood is employed on the Times now, isn't he?"

"Yes, but he will throw up and come to me the moment I ask him to do so. We've always been chums in a way, and

he's promised to stand by me and the Argus if he breaks a leg in doing so. I don't need a better assistant. He can handle the locals better than any new man. Ever since he went over to the Times that paper has been looking up, while the Argus, without his services, has been pointing the other way. Now, mother, am I to run the paper on trial for, say, three months?"

"Yes, Frank, you may do so; and may God bless your efforts and make you successful."

"A mother's prayer to that effect will certainly be answered," said the boy, putting his arms around her neck and kissing her. "If you only knew it, I believe you are giving me the chance of my life. I will now go to the office and have a heart-to-heart talk with Mr. Jebb."

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH FRANK LEARNS OF THE PERFDY OF MR. JEBB.

Green River, the scene of this story, was a wideawake town situated about fifty miles northwest of Chicago, on a river of the same name, and within five miles of the western shore of Lake Michigan.

Twelve years before it had consisted of one factory and perhaps fifty houses.

Now it was a great bustling town, with its banks, its hotels, its dozen churches, and its noisy streets.

Probably in a year or two it would become a city.

Already there were many handsome residences along the upper river front of the residential section, the finest of which belonged to Squire Roach, president of the First National Bank, and one of the trustees of the Park Avenue Methodist Church.

His son, Duncan, was, in his own opinion, the most aristocratic young man about town.

At any rate, he wore more expensive clothes than any boy of his acquaintance, and he only associated on terms of equality with the young people whose parents were well-to-do.

He had no use for boys who had to work for a living, and particularly he had no use for Frank Morris, who was his superior in every way but from a social standpoint.

He cordially disliked Frank, and never failed to sneer at him both in public and private.

Latterly, since the day Frank had given him the dressing-down for insulting Elsie Gray, he actually hated the young fellow, and his constant desire was for an opportunity to get even with him.

When Frank approached the office of the Argus on Main street he passed Duncan Roach talking on the corner of the street with a crony.

Duncan favored him with a malicious glance of ill-disguised satisfaction, and said something to his companion, who looked after Frank and laughed jeeringly.

Frank saw the look and heard the sneering laugh, but of course paid no attention to either.

When he reached the Argus office, the outer room, which answered for a business office, and was provided with two desks and chairs, cut off by a railing, was vacant.

The door leading into the combined composing-room and

press-room was open, and glancing in Frank saw Billings, the foreman, standing negligently beside the quarter-medium Gordon jobber, smoking a fat cigar, and talking to Gibson, the pressman, who was making a job ready on the machine.

Billy Miggles was feeding the small Gordon, while four bright-looking girls were setting type at their respective frames.

Nobody seemed to notice the appearance of Frank on the scene.

"Mr. Billings seems to be taking things easy," muttered the boy. "Well, this is pay-day. I guess I'll get along without him hereafter."

He heard a collection of voices engaged in conversation in the inner room, his father's editorial sanctum, now, of course, appropriated by Mr. Jebb.

"Seems to be more talk than business going on in there," thought Frank, "and this is our busy day, too. No wonder the Argus is on the toboggan, when the heads of the departments are working on the go-as-you-please principle."

The door was slightly ajar, and as the boy stood close to it, considering how he would open his interview with the editor and manager of the paper, he plainly overheard the conversation going on within.

He recognized the ponderous voice of Squire Roach, then the smooth, oily tones of Mr. Jebb, and at intervals the falsetto of Robinson, the new reporter.

"You think there will be no difficulty, then, in my getting possession of the Argus for the sum I offered Mrs. Morris?" asked the squire.

"I think not," replied Mr. Jebb. "I have strongly advised her to accept your offer. Billings and I figured the price low in your interest. The big press alone is worth more than \$1,000. Gibson said it cost \$2,500 second hand. Then there are two Gordon jobbers, the paper cutter, a good assortment of job letters, and the paper outfit. The steam engine belongs to the owner of the building."

"I don't know anything about the value of the presses and printing material. I rely on your judgment and that of Foreman Billings, who is a practical man, for that," said Squire Roach. "Of course I want to get it as cheap as possible."

"Certainly you do, squire," said Mr. Jebb, lighting a fresh cigar, "and I have attended to that part of the matter for you. The Argus establishment is easily worth \$3,000 as it stands; isn't that a fact, Robinson?"

"Cert," replied that dapper individual, nonchalantly puffing at a cigarette.

"Of course, the paper itself was a much more valuable asset when I took charge of it, and but for our little arrangement it would still be what it then was—the leading Republican newspaper of the county."

"Well," admitted the banker, "you certainly have hurt its reputation and commercial value to a considerable extent."

"That was what you expected of me, wasn't it?"

"Yes. Mr. Morris and myself never were on the best of

terms. I believe I have already intimated to you that I have political ambitions?"

Mr. Jebb nodded.

"I tried to get the nomination for the Legislature last fall, but Morris killed my chances. He supported Farmer Gray, who, by the way, was the only man elected on the Republican ticket from this county. When Morris took sick just before Christmas, and employed you to take charge of the Argus during his absence, I thought I saw a chance to get back at the man who had me turned down."

"I see," murmured Mr. Jebb.

"I made your acquaintance, and by degrees approached you with a proposition to work in my interest. My idea was to wreck the Argus, if possible, while Morris was out of the way, and then start a new paper, placing you at its head."

"Exactly," nodded Mr. Jebb again. "Your offer was too good to be turned down, since I figured that my position here was merely temporary. Morris was nothing to me, so we came to terms. I saw I could do very little as long as young Harwood was in the way; he was as stanch as steel to the Morris interests, so I got rid of him, hired Billings, an old-time "comp" to look after the mechanical end, and sent for my friend Robinson, who happened to be out of a job. I knew I could depend on Robinson."

"That's what," chirruped Robinson, lighting a fresh cigarette.

"Between us we cooked up a plan to put the Argus under an eclipse, didn't we, Robinson?"

"We did that," responded the reporter, with a grin.

"We mixed things up pretty well with the Republican party, and as a consequence our subscription list fell away and our advertising columns suffered. Then Robinson and Billings, between them, managed to put the job printing branch on the hog. At this point, seeing that Morris was slated for the graveyard, and that it was only a question of a short time before he would die, I suggested that there would probably be an opportunity for you to buy the Argus out, which would be much more advisable than starting an entirely new paper. We calculated you would be able to secure it at a bargain after Morris's death. Then Robinson and I would get a hustle on and would build it up for you again. I think the fruit of our endeavors is now sufficiently ripe to drop into your hands."

"You have managed very well, indeed, Mr. Jebb," said the banker, approvingly, "and your reward will be the editorial and business control of the Argus as soon as it comes into my possession, and it shall be yours as long as you choose to retain it, provided," and here the squire punctuated his remarks with a thump of his cane on the floor, "that you undo the damage you have done at my dictation and build the paper up again to its former position in Green River."

"Don't worry about that, Squire Roach. Robinson and I will attend to that, won't we, Ajax?"

"That's what we will, Amos. I've only to whistle and the advertisements will return."

"You hear, squire? The Argus will regain its lost influence in time to support you at the next election."

"That's what I want," said the great man, in a tone of satisfaction.

"What you want you shall have. Remember, your name at the head of the editorial page will add immense prestige to the paper, squire," said the astute Mr. Jebb, playing upon the man's weak point—his vanity. "You are the most important as well as the most popular man in town."

"Hem!" murmured the squire, who wasn't quite sure of the latter point, although he had long since persuaded himself of the truth of the former.

"It is, perhaps, fortunate that I hold a mortgage on the Morris cottage for a matter of \$800. This fact is bound to influence the widow in this transaction. On the whole, I think I can afford to be a bit more liberal and offer her \$1,000; that will give her \$200 over and above the mortgage, and it is not to be sneezed at by a woman in her circumstances."

"Even at \$1,000 you will be getting this property dirt cheap. All I have been afraid of is that her son, who is a pretty shrewd boy, I have discovered, might prevail on her not to sell the paper at that figure. I am bound to say that if she advertised it in the proper way she could get very much better offers than this one of yours."

"I think I had better run over and see her, and try to bring the sale to a focus before she gets any such idea into her head," said the squire, with some precipitation.

"I think you had myself. Don't let a bargain like this get away from you for want of prompt attention. I advise you even to go as high as \$1,500 sooner than take any chances of losing it altogether," said Mr. Jebb, who felt it was to his interest that the big man should get hold of the paper as soon as possible.

"You've got the right man when you've got Mr. Jebb," chipped in Robinson, who felt that he couldn't do better than support his friend at every emergency.

Whereupon the two friends looked across at one another and winked slyly, a little bit of pantomime which quite escaped Squire Roach's observation.

"Yes, I will call on Mrs. Morris at once," said the nabob of Green River, rising from his chair, a signal that the interview was at an end.

"And when I see you again," said Mr. Jebb, also rising from his editorial chair, "I hope the matter will have been finally settled to our mutual advantage."

"I think you may rely upon that, Mr. Jebb," replied the squire, condescendingly.

Then Robinson opened the door and the three walked out to find, much to their surprise, Frank Morris established at his ease in a chair in the outer office.

Mr. Jebb wondered, with some uneasiness, if the boy had overheard any of their conversation.

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH FRANK ASSUMES CONTROL OF THE GREEN RIVER ARGUS.

Squire Roach nodded superciliously at Frank as he passed out of the office, but the boy acknowledged it with his usual politeness.

"Why, hello, Master Morris," said Mr. Jebb, effusively, "haven't kept you waiting, have I?"

"No sir," answered Frank, quietly.

"How long have you been here?" continued the manager and editor, a bit anxiously.

"Not very long," replied the boy, looking Mr. Jebb in the eye in a way which somewhat discomposed that shrewd individual.

"I'm glad to hear it," said Mr. Jebb, with a feeling of relief, as he took the other chair, while Robinson disappeared into the composing-room, where he lighted another cigarette and began to jolly the female compositors.

His appearance there didn't seem to worry Billings in the least, for he continued his conversation with Gibson just the same, which showed that the foreman felt certain of his job under Mr. Jebb and his associate Robinson.

Evidently it was high time some change for the better should be made if the plant was to be kept out of the sheriff's hands.

"Did your mother send you with a message to me?" continued Mr. Jebb, eyeing the boy keenly. "Or perhaps you have brought the money to pay off the force?"

"Yes, Mr. Jebb, I have brought the money to pay off the employes of this paper."

"All right," said the manager, briskly, "I'll take it," and he stretched out his hands expectantly.

"As my mother has turned the management of the Argus over to me, beginning with to-day, I will pay off myself."

"Turned the management over to you?" gasped Mr. Jebb, as if he couldn't believe the evidence of his own ears.

"Yes, sir," said Frank, with the greatest composure; "and let me say it is quite time something was done to save the Argus from going to smash."

"Young man," said Mr. Jebb, with an assumption of injured dignity, "are you aware that your remarks might be construed by me as an insult? I was hired by your father to manage and edit this newspaper, and I flatter myself, from my long career as a journalist, that I understand my business."

"I will not question your ability, Mr. Jebb," said the boy, calmly, "but I do question your loyalty to my dead father and his family."

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. Jebb, clearly startled.

"I mean that you have not worked in our interest. That you have betrayed the trust we reposed in you. In other words, I accuse you of having sold yourself to Squire Roach, and in order to accomplish his plan of freezing my mother out of the Argus you have deliberately conspired to partially ruin the paper, and you have practically succeeded."

"Young man, you are dreaming," sneered Mr. Jebb, with a guilty flush on his face.

"Will you explain why you discharged Dan Harwood, who satisfactorily filled the duties of foreman and local reporter for my father?" asked Frank, firmly.

"I don't see that you have a right to question any of my official acts," replied Mr. Jebb, aggressively.

"I have just told you that the Argus has passed into my

control, therefore I have a right to inquire into any matter which does not strike me as the right thing."

"I do not recognize your authority, Frank Morris. If your mother will come here herself and tell me that she has turned the paper over to you, why——"

"Here is her written order to that effect. Do you question that?" and the boy flashed his authority under Mr. Jebb's eyes.

"Do I understand that your mother has reconsidered her plan of selling this paper to Squire Roach, who has made her an offer for it?"

"The Argus is not for sale at present."

"As you seem to have taken charge here, I presume you expect me to run this paper for you. Is that the idea?"

"No, sir. I cannot afford to employ so expensive a man as yourself, even if I was willing to continue you at the head of affairs, which, after the charges I have made against you, would hardly strike you as probable. The Argus must either reduce its running expenses or go under."

"The most sensible thing for your mother to do would be to sell out," suggested Mr. Jebb, more than ever anxious that Squire Roach should get the paper, for he began to see the possibility that his plans might, after all, go astray.

"That is where we differ, Mr. Jebb."

"Might I inquire who is going to run this paper?"

"I am going to try to."

"You!—a boy!" and Mr. Jebb laughed sarcastically.

"Come, now, you're joking, aren't you?"

"No, sir, I am not joking."

"If you really mean that, all I have to say is this newspaper will be in the sheriff's hands in less than a month, and the squire will be able to bid it in at a considerable saving over his present offer."

"We will not argue the matter, Mr. Jebb. As no good can come of prolonging this conversation, I will settle with you for your services to date."

Frank Morris pulled a roll of money from his pocket, and peeling off sundry bills, pushed them toward Mr. Jebb, together with a receipt which he requested him to sign.

"All right," said the manager, with a sneer; "I presume I am to consider myself discharged; is that it?"

"You may consider your connection with the Argus as severed," said the boy, calmly.

"Oh, I'll be back again in a week or so," remarked Mr. Jebb, carelessly. "Just as soon as Squire Roach gets control."

"I wouldn't rely too much on that idea," said Frank, grimly.

"I know what I'm talking about," said Mr. Jebb, rising to his feet, and regarding the new manager of the Argus with a sarcastic smile. "Like all inexperienced boys, you have an expansive opinion of your own importance. You fancy it is easy to run a newspaper. You will transfer a few of your school-boy compositions to the columns of the Argus and call 'em editorials. You will expect subscribers and advertisers to walk humbly into your office with the cash to pay your expenses. Oh, yes; I've met with a few of your kind before—college graduates, and all that, who

thought they knew it all. Well, go on, young man. Nothing like a little experience to knock the nonsense out of your shallow brains. I feel sorry for your mother, that's all."

"She doesn't look for your sympathy, Mr. Jebb. You've done your best to depreciate her property while she was paying you for your best services. If you call that a manly attitude toward an inexperienced woman who trusted you, I feel sorry for your sense of justice and honor. I'd hate to tell you what I think of you. I leave that to your own conscience, if you possess one."

Mr. Jebb flushed to the roots of his hair.

He could not disguise the fact from himself that he had acted a most contemptible part.

But to be brought to task for his conduct by a mere boy made him angry.

It seems to be the way of the world that we dislike those most whom we have injured.

"All right, young man," he gritted between his teeth. "He laughs best who laughs last. You twig my meaning? Good afternoon, my little editor. I wish you all the luck you deserve," and he strode toward the door, after taking his hat from a hook on the wall.

"Thank you, Mr. Jebb," said Frank, smilingly. "At least you have made one sensible remark. All the luck I expect is what I shall deserve."

But Mr. Jebb, with a sneering grunt, passed out into Main street and started to take a car for Squire Roach's residence.

Frank then went to the door of the composing-room and called in Mr. Robinson.

"There is your money, Mr. Robinson. Please sign that receipt. Thank you. I am sorry, but I will have to dis-pense with your services after to-day."

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Jebb's associate.

"I won't be able to use you any longer," said Frank, looking squarely at him.

"Oh, indeed!" replied Robinson, sarcastically. "I like that. Mr. Jebb hired me, and I stay here as long as Mr. Jebb says so. Understand?" and the reporter produced his cigarette box and took out a fresh "coffin nail."

"Mr. Jebb's connection with the Argus has already ceased."

"Who says it has?" ejaculated Robinson, flippantly.

"I say so."

"Oh, you don't count."

"Don't I?" answered the boy, cheerfully. "Just glance over that, please," and Frank handed him his mother's order which established him in control of the Argus, commencing with that date.

Mr. Robinson was somewhat taken aback.

He certainly hadn't expected such a change in the aspect of affairs.

"What did Mr. Jebb have to say to that?" he inquired uneasily.

"I will have to refer you to Mr. Jebb for the answer."

"You're mighty smart, aren't you?" said Robinson, with a sneer.

"I think that is all, Mr. Robinson," said the boy, smoothly.

"Oh, you do, eh? I think you're a stuck-up whipper-snapper, do you know that? I'm going to see Mr. Jebb about it," said Mr. Robinson, rising.

"You're at liberty to do so," replied the boy.

"The idea of a kid like you trying to lord it over a gentleman like me. Well, you won't last long here, that's a comfort. Squire Roach will own the Argus before the month is out, and Mr. Jebb and myself will be back in our old jobs."

Mr. Robinson blew out a wreath of smoke as he walked nonchalantly out of the business office of the Argus.

Billings was the next victim, and he took his discharge aggressively, like printers often do when they see a good thing slipping away from them.

"Mr. Jebb brought me here from Chicago and he promised me a steady job."

"Well, he gave it to you as long as he could."

"Has he left the office?" asked Billings, in surprise.

"He is out of the Argus for good."

"He didn't tell me anything about it," said Billings, in an injured tone. "Who's going to run the composing-room and set the jobs and advertisements?"

"That needn't worry you, Mr. Billings."

"Say, are you the boss of this thing now?"

"I am in full charge."

"Well, what's the matter with keeping me? I've got the lay of the office down fine, I have. If you'll keep me on I'll work for a couple of dollars under the scale. How's that?"

"Sorry, Mr. Billings; but this office, if it is small, is going to be run on union principles. A few dollars one way or the other won't make or break the Argus. As there is no union in this town I shall recognize an international traveling card, and pay the scale when I wish to employ a printer. By the way, Mr. Billings, do you hold a card?"

"I did once, but I got hard up and it ran out," admitted the man, sheepishly.

"I thought so, when you offered to work for less than the rate."

"Oh, a foreman doesn't have to have a card," said Billings, glibly.

"Excuse me, but I think you'll find they do have to have one. Well, that's all, Mr. Billings."

"Ain't you going to pay my fare back to Chicago?"

"No, sir. If Mr. Jebb made any such arrangement with you you'll have to see him about it. Good-day."

Billings walked out very much disgruntled.

Frank then paid off the rest of the hands, and sent Billy Miggles over to the Times office with a note to Dan Harwood.

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH FRANK MORRIS AND DAN HARWOOD START THE BALL ROLLING.

"Well, Dan," said Frank Morris to his friend Dan Harwood, when the two boys met by appointment after supper that evening at the office of the Argus, "are you with me?"

"Am I with you? Well, say, you can just bank on it I am," said Dan, his freckled countenance expanding into one of his usual cheerful grins.

"Did you resign from the Times?"

"That's what I did, and you can bet your suspenders old Bentley was as mad as a hatter. He called me several things that I wouldn't dare repeat."

"You're not under any obligations to him, are you?" asked Frank, anxiously.

"I should say not. I never could do enough for him while in his employ. I wasn't his foreman, thank goodness—poor old Jinks has a hard time of it. I gave him a lift whenever I could at the stone and make-up—you know I'm pretty rapid at that. I set half of the advertisements and most of the job work. However, I didn't leave Bentley in a hole at all, for he hired your late foreman, Billings, who dropped in looking for work after I resigned."

"I'm glad to hear he's got a person in your place," said Frank, with an air of relief. "I wouldn't like him to feel that I had put him at a disadvantage by taking you away."

"Don't worry about that. Billings ought to be able to fill the bill."

"He didn't do it here, but probably that's because Mr. Jebb let him do as he pleased. Well, Dan, I'll expect you to put your shoulder to the wheel."

"That's what I'm here for, Frank. I guess you know whether or not you can depend on me. I learned the business under your father, and he, I think, admitted that I panned out all right."

"Yes, Dan, father always said you were the smartest printer, for your age, he ever saw, and my father was one of the best at the business himself years ago before he went into the publishing line. Then you certainly have a wonderful knack at making interesting locals and spicy paragraphs."

"Kind of comes natural to me," said Dan, with another grin.

"Well, let's get down to business, Dan. I'm sorry to say the Argus is in a pretty bad way."

Harwood showed no surprise at this information, for Frank had consulted with him before on this subject, when he talked with him about Mr. Jebb's methods, and the loss of prestige and income the paper was suffering under that gentleman's peculiar management.

Now, Frank told him of the conversation he had overheard that afternoon between Mr. Jebb and Squire Roach, which only went to confirm the suspicions the two boys had already formed in their own minds days before.

"That man Jebb is a rascal," said Dan, vigorously, "and it would give me great pleasure to knock him into the middle of next week. When he discharged me I demanded his reason, but he refused to give me any satisfaction. Then I told you about it, and you promised to have the matter investigated, but of course your father's condition interfered with that, so when I saw a chance to go to work on the Times I accepted it until things got straightened out at the Argus."

"It remains for you and I, Dan, to straighten things out."

"Well, we'll do it, all right."

"So far as you are concerned, it will be plain sailing, with some extra hard work at the start. But I'm up against it hard, Dan. I have had no real editorial experience, though I'm fairly familiar in a general way with newspaper methods, owing to the many opportunities I had to put in my spare time under father's direction, both at the business desk and in reporting such events as came within my scope. So you see I'm greatly handicapped."

"Pooh! You'll manage all right. You're a good writer. Many a story of yours I've set up myself, Frank, and I'm bound to say you handled the subjects all right."

"What I lack in experience I'm going to make up by hard work and plenty of it. The paper is going down hill. We've got to put the brakes on, turn her around and pull her up again to where she was before father took sick."

"All right, Frank. How does the Argus stand for tomorrow?"

"Well, there are a lot of proofs here that haven't been read yet. I guess most of the copy is in type. Whatever we lack you'll have to make up with plate matter. There seems to be several boxes of it on hand that haven't been used. Our advertisements look kind of skimpy this week, I'm sorry to say. That's where it hits us on a tender spot. Newspapers can't be run on wind."

"Hardly. The Times has got most of the business you've lost. It's up to you now to get it back again."

"Well, Dan, light up in the composing-room and take a look around and see what's to be done, while I read some of these proofs for you to correct. It looks as though we had a night's work before us."

Dan did as directed, while Frank, pencil in hand, tackled the pile of proofs Mr. Robinson should have attended to hours before.

Green River supported three newspapers.

The Times, Democratic organ, and the Argus, Republican ditto, both issued twice a week—Wednesdays and Saturdays.

The Record was an independent weekly, devoted largely to farming interests, but was inferior in circulation and influence to the other two.

Politically the town was pretty evenly divided, though if anything the Democrats had of late the better of the situation.

At any rate, this party had won out at the last local election, and was in control of the leading offices, and consequently the Times enjoyed a monopoly of the public printing.

Mr. Morris had always vigorously supported the Republican cause, and when that party was in power had participated in the fruits of its success.

When Mr. Jebb took charge of the Argus, about the first of the year, it was expected he would carry out the policy of the paper on the same strict lines.

The Republican managers, who had just lost the election, although Farmer Gray, who, through the influence of Mr.

Morris, had obtained the nomination to the State Legislature over Squire Roach, had been elected by a small plurality, were not at all pleased to observe the lukewarm sentiments of the new editor.

A committee was appointed to call on Mr. Morris at his home and remonstrate.

Mr. Morris lost no time in calling Mr. Jebb down, and for a time the political tone of the Argus was restored, but this improvement lasted only so long as it seemed advisable to Mr. Jebb to continue it.

A second committee was unable to see Mr. Morris on account of the state of his health, and the members transferred their attention to Mr. Jebb personally, but met with such little consideration that they retired in disgust.

In consequence many of the Republicans withdrew their support from the Argus, several of the biggest advertisers going so far as to take their business announcements to the Times, while a few handed them in to the Record.

A great many subscriptions were temporarily cancelled for the purpose of bringing the editor of the Argus to terms.

But this produced no results, as Mr. Jebb was acting under instructions from Squire Roach, who at the same time was one of the most rabid of the Republican kickers, and was doing his best to lay the whole blame for the backsliding of the Argus to the sick proprietor, who was unaware of the tempest that was brewing through the treachery of the man he had hired to fill his place.

Frank Morris had thought proper to interview the chairman of the Republican organization and assure him of his father's loyalty to the party, and his belief that Mr. Jebb was acting entirely on his own responsibility.

The boy said that as soon as his father got better the trouble would be corrected.

But Mr. Morris didn't get better; on the contrary, he got worse and finally died, much to Squire Roach's satisfaction, who now thought he saw his way clear to getting possession of the Argus from the widow.

Such was the condition of things in respect to the Argus when Frank took charge, and one of his first acts was to kill an editorial of Mr. Jebb's on the Republican outlook for 190--, and rewrite it along the vigorous and outspoken lines formerly pursued by his father.

There was nothing lukewarm about the leader when he had finished it.

It was sharp, concise and to the point.

"I want you to put this in type right away, Dan," he said, walking into the composing-room. "Double lead it and put it at the head of the second column on the editorial page."

"All right," said Dan, taking up a stick and going to a frame holding a pair of ten-point cases.

Previous to this Dan had corrected a dozen proofs, made up two pages of the paper, completed a third which Billings had left unfinished, and had commenced to set up out of his head half a column of local paragraphs, most of which he had collected for the Times that day, when Frank called him off to set up the editorial.

The young editor then prepared an article in which he stated that the policy of the paper would hereafter be aggressively Republican, as in the days when his father was at the helm, and he appealed directly to the voters of the party to support his efforts in the way he hoped to deserve of them.

He carried the copy to Dan, with instructions to double lead it also, and insert it directly under the publication announcements in the first column of the editorial page.

The two boys finished their labors shortly after three on Saturday morning, and when the pressman turned up at four o'clock he found the pair of chases, each containing two of the outside pages—the inside four having been worked off Friday afternoon—ready to go to press.

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH DUNCAN ROACH VISITS THE ARGUS OFFICE.

The first issue of the Green River Argus under the direction of Frank Morris appeared on time, notwithstanding the condition in which it had been left by Mr. Jebb and his associates, and the boy's political leader, backed up with his heart-to-heart talk with his readers, created a favorable impression in town.

Squire Roach had been much disappointed as well as disgusted by the refusal of Mrs. Morris to accept even \$1,500 for the paper when he approached her on the subject the preceding afternoon.

His feelings were certainly not improved when Mr. Jebb called upon him later with the intelligence that he had been summarily dismissed as editor and manager of the Argus.

Later on he learned that Mr. Robinson had also been discharged, and that Foreman Billings had transferred his valuable services to the Times.

Under these circumstances he was disagreeably surprised to find his copy of the Argus lying beside his plate as usual Saturday morning when he entered the breakfast-room.

It had been his impression that the paper wouldn't be out till late in the day, if it came out at all—a fact that was pretty certain to raise an indignant howl from its subscribers.

But there it was just as if nothing had occurred to interfere with the internal workings of the Argus establishment.

"Mr. Jebb must have left the paper all ready to be printed," was his private comment as he unfolded the sheet, and proceeded to look up the editorial written by his ready tool on lines suggested by himself, a proof of which he had already corrected.

But lo! the editorial was missing, while in its place he found Frank's vigorous contribution.

"Who in thunder wrote that!" he ejaculated, in a tone of strong disapproval. "And where is the editorial I ordered put in?"

"What's the matter, father?" asked Duncan, surprised by his parent's vehemence.

"Matter!" exclaimed Squire Roach, "there is considerable the matter. Read that editorial, and let me know if you think that young monkey, Frank Morris, could have written it. I don't believe he has the ability."

"Frank Morris write that!" said Duncan Roach, after he had finished reading the leader. "He did like fun! What makes you think he did?"

"Well, I don't know who could have written it—Mr. Jebb wouldn't have presumed to do it, for it is against the policy I mapped out for him to follow."

"What has Frank Morris got to do with the Argus, anyway?" asked Duncan, for he had not heard of the change which had taken place in its management.

"He seems to have a good deal to do with it," grunted the squire, in a vexed tone. "His mother has not only refused to sell me the paper, but has actually turned it over to that young whippersnapper."

"Turned the Argus over to Frank Morris?" exclaimed Duncan, greatly surprised.

"Yes. And he has begun to run things with a high hand. The first thing he did was to discharge Mr. Jebb."

"Who's going to run the paper for him, then?"

"He expects to do it himself, so he told Mr. Jebb."

"Ho! He run the Argus! Run it into the ground, maybe," said Duncan Roach, scornfully.

"I've no doubt but he will do that. What can he expect to do without experience?"

"Well, all I've got to say is he's got a cast-iron nerve," sneered Duncan.

"He has certainly no lack of assurance," coincided the squire.

"He'll end in a bust-up, that's some satisfaction."

"I don't see how he will be able to avoid it," said the Squire, recovering his good humor at this reflection.

"And then you'll be able to buy the paper at the sheriff's sale," grinned his son.

"I shall certainly try to purchase it if it goes under the hammer."

"I'll be on hand when the beggar is sold out, and give him the grand laugh," said Duncan, maliciously.

"Duncan, you must not express such uncharitable sentiments toward your neighbor," said the elder Roach, reprovingly.

"Ho!" snorted Duncan. "I hate the fellow!"

"Duncan, you surprise me."

"How about that mortgage you hold on the Morris cottage?" asked the boy.

"What about it?"

"Maybe they won't be able to pay that when it comes due."

"The Argus ought to fetch enough to settle that, even at forced sale. Mr. Morris was certainly ill-advised not to accept the \$1,500 I offered her yesterday for the paper as it stands. I'm afraid she will have occasion to regret not having done so. I dare say she would have closed with me but for her son."

"If she allows that duffer Frank to run her affairs she can't blame you for bidding in her property as cheap as possible when it comes to be sold out."

"Certainly not," said Squire Roach, complacently. "I have made her a very fair proposition, and by refusing it she takes all the risk on her own shoulders."

"Women are queer, anyway," remarked Duncan jeeringly.

This was more than his mother, who had been a quiet listener to the conversation, could stand.

"Duncan, are you aware what you are saying?" she said, severely.

"Oh, you know what I mean," replied the boy, rather flippantly.

"I don't wish to hear such a remark from you in the future. It is a reflection on me as well as the persons you have in your mind."

Duncan thought it advisable to keep quiet for a little while, and when he opened his mouth again the conversation had turned into another channel.

"I'm glad I don't have to work for a living," he said to himself, complacently, when an hour later he peered in at one of the street windows of the Argus composing-room and observed Dan Harwood, stick in hand, hustling away for dear life at a rush job which had just been received by Frank.

Then he concluded he would enter the office and see how things were getting on without the talented Mr. Jebb, notwithstanding the fact that he and Frank were not on good terms.

"I'll make the beggar do a job for me," he said, thinking he saw a way to annoy the young editor of the Argus, quite overlooking the fact that he would really be doing the establishment a small service.

So in he walked, with a poor imitation of his father's ponderous strut and air of superiority.

Frank, who was seated at the business desk, making out his advertising bills for that week, looked up and regarded his presence with some surprise.

"Hello, Morris," said Duncan, superciliously, "I hear you're the boss of this outfit now. As I like to encourage beginners, I thought I'd drop in and give you a job."

"I'm much obliged to you for thinking of me," replied Frank, with a queer little smile. "Small favors are thankfully received. What can I do for you?"

"I dare say you need all the work you can get to keep the place out of the hands of the sheriff," grinned young Roach, maliciously.

"I don't think the sheriff will bother me," answered the young editor, quietly.

"You don't expect to make the Argus pay, do you?" asked Duncan, in surprise.

"I see no reason why I shouldn't."

"Ho!" snorted Duncan. "My father says the paper was running at a loss even under Mr. Jebb, who is a first-class newspaper man. You're only a boy, with no experience. How can you expect to do any better?"

"By attending strictly to business, and doing the best I can," answered Frank, pleasantly. "What kind of a job do you want done?"

"I want some visiting cards. I'd like to see some of your samples. I couldn't use anything common, you know," said young Roach, loftily.

Frank took down a pasteboard box containing samples of

card work executed at the office, and picked out several specimens of the best.

"That's the best wedding bristol, and will cost you 50 cents for fifty, or 75 cents for 100."

"Haven't you got anything better?" inquired Duncan.

"The specimen you have in your hand is the best stock in the market. You can see that was selected by Judge Smith."

"Do the Smiths have their printing done here?" asked the young aristocrat in a tone of surprise, for Mrs. Smith was the acknowledged leader of Green River's most exclusive set.

"Certainly," said Frank, with an amused smile.

"I always thought they had their work done in Chicago," said Duncan.

"We can do job work as well as it is done in Chicago, as far as our line of type permits."

"Then how do you account for the Times taking so much of your printing away from you?" asked Duncan, feeling as if he had scored a point.

"I am not prepared to discuss that point," said Frank, with dignity. "I expect to recover whatever trade we have lost of late."

"You think you will," sneered Duncan. "I guess the Times knows how to hold on to its work, all right. I hear you've lost your foreman."

"I can spare him."

"That's because you haven't got enough to keep a good man."

"I've got a perfectly competent printer."

"I s'pose you mean Dan Harwood?"

"I do."

"He's only a boy. Billings calls him a two-thirder. He's got a lot to learn."

"Shall I print you fifty of these cards?" asked Frank, not caring to continue the discussion.

"You may as well make it a hundred, for I use a good many of them," said Duncan, pompously. "A person in my position naturally does, you know."

"All right," said Frank. "I suppose you want your address on them?"

"Certainly. When can I have them?"

"This afternoon if you wish."

"Very well. I will call for them. I suppose you'd like me to pay in advance so you can buy the cards," said Duncan, pulling out a roll of bills.

"It is unnecessary," replied the young editor, ignoring the inference his enemy contended to convey. "I keep an ample stock on hand."

Just then a very pretty young girl walked into the business office.

"Delighted to meet you, Miss Gray," said Duncan, raising his hat to the visitor with one of his most fetching smiles. "Shall I have the pleasure——"

But Elsie Gray cut him short with a freezing look and then turned away.

She had not forgotten his conduct on a previous occasion,

when Frank Morris had found it necessary to interfere between them on her behalf.

Duncan, greatly embarrassed, smothered an angry expression which rose to his lips and walked stiffly out of the office.

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH ELSIE GRAY, MR. DABBLETON, AN ADVANCE AGENT, AND JUDGE SMITH ENLIVEN THE ARGUS OFFICE.

"Frank Morris, I'm ever so glad to see you," cried Elsie Gray, turning toward the young editor with her daintily-gloved hands extended, as soon as Duncan Roach had withdrawn.

"Not more so than I to see you, Miss Elsie," said Frank, grasping both her hands with an eager movement that brought a slight flush to her charming face. "Come inside the railing and take a seat."

Elsie Gray was undeniably a lovely girl.

Sylph-like and petite of form, she was gracefulness itself.

A wealth of shining brown hair escaped from a bewitching sort of gypsy hat which sat coquettishly upon her shapely head.

And her smile?

Frank Morris thought it something beyond the power of pen to describe, and he was not such a bad descriptive writer himself.

"I hope I'm not disturbing you, Mr. Morris," she said, with a roguish smile. "If I am, just give me a hint and I will relieve you of my presence. If there is anything that I detest myself it is a bore, you know."

"I assure you that you're not incommoding me in the least; while your presence in this office I might compare to a ray of sunshine, if I wished to be poetical," he said gallantly.

"How nice you do say it, sir," laughed Elsie. "Really, I shall begin to believe father was right when he said you were the coming editor of Green River."

"Did your father really say that?" asked Frank, surprised.

"He said that this morning at the breakfast table when he opened his copy of the Argus, saw your name for the first time as editor, in place of Amos Jebb, and read what he called your very able editorial on the Republican prospects for 190—."

"I am very much obliged to your father for the compliment, but I fear he flatters me. It will be time enough for all that, you know, when I have demonstrated what I really can do."

"Straws show the way the wind blows. I am quoting my father, mind you, and your first political article shows most encouraging promise, not only as regards yourself, but with reference to the Republican cause in Green River, which my father, thanks to the able efforts of the late Mr. Morris, represents in the State Legislature."

"You wouldn't make a bad campaign orator, Miss Elsie," smiled Frank.

"Do you really think so? Surely you're teasing me."

"I wouldn't be guilty of teasing you, Miss Elsie," said

Frank, going on with his work in such a way as to still hold her attention and entertain her.

"This isn't where you do your writing, is it?" she said, looking around the plainly furnished outer office.

"Oh, no; not as a rule. Yonder is my sanctum, to which it will give me great pleasure to introduce you as soon as I shall have completed this little bit of routine work dealing with the practical part of the establishment."

"I suppose, now that you have taken charge of the Argus, you will be a very busy boy henceforth, and I must not expect to see as much of you as usual?"

"I certainly expect to have but very little time on my hands, for a while to come, at any rate. But I hope you will drop in here often and talk to me, for I feel as if your presence will be something of an inspiration, toward better work."

"Really, now, I ought to feel flattered at that," and the little miss rose and dropped the young editor a most charming courtesy.

Hardly had she sat down again, when the street door was darkened by a dapper-looking man, dressed in a loud vest, across which hung a heavy gold chain.

"I should like to see the editor of the Argus," he said, in a business-like tone.

"I am the editor," said Frank, rising from his chair and coming to the rail.

The visitor favored him with a comprehensive glance from head to foot, and then handed him a card, which read:

"Dionysius Dabbleton, Advance Agent, On the Blink Combination."

"Will you step into the inner office, Mr. Dabbleton?" said Frank. "Excuse me a few minutes, Miss Elsie."

The girl bowed, and the boy editor piloted his visitor into his sanctum.

"Has this paper changed hands, or are you a relative of the party who conducted the Argus last fall, when I was in town with 'The Dancing Whirligigs'?" asked the theatrical agent, when he had taken his seat.

"I am Mr. Morris' son. He is dead only a very short time," replied Frank.

"Sorry to hear of your bereavement. Nice gentleman, as I remember him. And now I want this advertisement inserted in your next paper, together with this quarter-column reading notice. I will give you an order on the treasurer of the company for the bill, which you will present after nine o'clock at the box office on the night of the show—that is next Thursday. Here are four tickets, and remember we expect a first-class notice. Send proofs of the advertisement to me at the Neptune House before two o'clock this afternoon, and two copies of your paper under personal cover to Ridgeville. I shall not use the Times this trip, as that fellow Bentley did me dirt when I was ahead of 'The Whirligigs,' and no man rubs it into me twice, if I know it. I'm going over to the Record now, which comes out on Thursday, I believe. My paper* will

be out Monday. We have a twelve-sheet stand that's a honey-cooler, and the lithos of 'On the Blink' are the finest going. Miss Pattie Atherton, our star soubrette, was lately robbed of nine solitaire diamond rings, presented by various friends since we opened in Jayville this spring. Don't forget to spread yourself on these little facts when you write your notice. I won't overlook it when I'm around this fall again."

Mr. Dabbleton was clearly a man of action, for as soon as he had finished his business with the Argus he was on the move again.

"Don't smoke, eh?" he said, as Frank declined a cigar. "Well, hand it to your foreman, or whoever smokes about your place. Good-day, and don't forget those proofs by not later than two sharp."

With a quick nod he passed rapidly out into Main street.

"That was a theatrical advance agent—the man ahead of the show," explained Frank to Miss Elsie. "The company will strike town some time Thursday."

The boy went into the composing-room and handed the theatrical advertisements to Dan.

"Proof wanted by two o'clock sharp. Don't fail. Send Billy with them up to the Neptune House. Here's the man's card. And, by the way, run off a hundred of these visiting cards some time this afternoon," and Frank handed Dan the copy for Duncan Roach's little job. Perhaps Harwood was not surprised at the order!

Elsie Gray spent a quarter of an hour in Frank's private office, and then left to do some shopping, promising to drop in again at an early day.

She had not been gone over five minutes when Judge Smith, chairman of the Republican County Committee, came in, and the young editor ushered his distinguished visitor into his sanctum.

"Young man," said Judge Smith, in his genial way, "I see you have taken charge of the Argus."

"Yes, sir. A radical change was necessary, if we hoped to keep the paper in the family. I have put my shoulder to the wheel, and I mean to do my utmost to bring the Argus up to its former standing in Green River."

"Judging by your first leader, which I assume is from your pen, since nothing so vigorous and to the point has appeared in the paper since your father was forced to retire from its conduct, I may say that you have once more brought the Argus in line with the real sentiments of the Republican party. This is encouraging, and will certainly redound to your advantage. The policy persisted in by Mr. Jebb, your father's editor, was simply suicidal; and I regret to say it was always my belief that it was inspired by some one whose object was not only to ruin the Argus, but to seriously cripple the prospects of the Republican party in this town. The conversation I had with you on a previous occasion leads me to believe that we can rely on you, as we always could on your father. Now, as you are young and inexperienced in politics—though I am bound to say your editorial shows great promise—it will give me pleasure to act as your political adviser, particularly later on, when the

* Meaning the general printing, such as posters (stands of three sheets or more pasted up on walls and billboards), half and quarter sheet long bills, gutter snipes, lithographs for store windows, etc.

real work of the campaign begins. I will be glad to meet you, either at my home or my office, at any time."

"Thank you, Judge Smith. I will be pleased to avail myself of your invitation. I understand the responsibilities I have assumed, and it is my wish to acquit myself in such a way as will best satisfy the wishes of the community—at least that part of it to whom the Argus must look for support. I am only a boy, it is true, but I mean to do a man's part, even before I attain my majority."

"I am glad to hear you talk this way, Frank Morris, for it shows the stuff of which you are made. You are very like your father, and had he lived, I am satisfied he would have lifted the Argus to a high pinnacle of prosperity. Though the Argus has undoubtedly gone downhill during the last six months, and has lost the confidence of the Republican voters of Green River, still, that is no reason why you may not recover lost ground. Your father's policy was successful. Follow that, and improve upon it if you are able, and success is pretty certain to come to you."

"Thank you, sir. While I am in control of the Argus I mean it shall never disgrace the name of Morris."

"Spoken like a man, Frank," said the judge, rising and slapping the boy encouragingly on the back. "I am satisfied that you will make your mark in time. I can see that you have your full share of the grit and perseverance which land the American boy at the top of the heap. I wish you every success in your efforts as a young editor and newspaper man, and will watch your progress with satisfaction. Good-bye," and Judge Smith shook hands with Frank and passed out into the street.

At two o'clock the proof of the theatrical advertisement was passed upon by Mr. Dableton, and the type was locked in the form for printing. When Frank presented his bill it was promptly paid.

CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH FRANK GETS A LARGE CONTRACT FOR PRINTING FROM A LOCAL MANUFACTORY.

On the following morning Frank went to church with his mother, as was their custom, and in the afternoon he attended the Sunday school, for he was a member of the Bible class.

As a matter of course, he met both Elsie Gray and Duncan Roach.

The latter was both surprised and disgusted to hear that Frank and his mother had actually been asked to dine that afternoon with Judge Smith and his family.

"I don't see what Judge Smith can be thinking about, to ask such common people to his house," said Duncan to one of his cronies.

When he went home he hastened to carry the news to his father.

"The judge must have an ax to grind," said Squire Roach, not at all pleased with the intelligence.

"What kind of an ax?" asked his son, with a show of interest.

"A political one, I presume," replied his father, in a disgruntled tone.

What the squire really feared was that Judge Smith might throw his influence over to the Argus and thus help the interests of the Morris family.

So he determined to get busy at once and try to offset any such move.

Mr. Jebb and his associate, Robinson, were boarding at the Neptune House at the squire's expense, for reasons that the rich man would not have cared to have generally known, and he concluded to call on the ex-editor of the Argus that evening and go over the situation with him.

On Monday morning Frank Morris made a tour of the large business houses that had withdrawn their advertisements from his paper.

His bright and convincing manner attracted the attention of the persons on whom he called, and he succeeded in recovering several of the paper's former patrons, and from others received promises of subsequent patronage.

On the whole, he was satisfied with his morning's work.

That afternoon he called on the manager of the Green River Lock and Bolt factory and made a bid for their new catalogue, which had to be delivered in time for the fall trade.

Heretofore this work had been turned out in Chicago.

It was a fair-sized job, as catalogues go, and very "fat," in printer's parlance, consisting largely of cuts flanked by short price lists in six-point type, with no display matter other than a heading on each page.

Judge Smith had told Frank what the company paid for the previous year's edition, and he and Dan figured that the Chicago printing house had had a "cinch." So Frank determined to put in an estimate for it at a slightly lower price.

"Have you ever done any work like this before?" inquired the manager of the bolt and nut works, after Frank had introduced the object of his visit.

"No, sir," replied the boy, frankly.

"How do you know then that you will be able to handle the job and get it out on time?"

"The foreman of my composing-room assures me that, with the necessary help—which we can easily bring from Chicago—we can do the work."

"What kind of six-point type have you?"

"Ronaldson face."

"That's satisfactory. Is it in good condition?"

"Brand new."

"You have never used it on the paper?"

"No, sir. Father got about five hundred pounds of it dirt cheap at a sale in Chicago. He bought it with the intention of bidding on the State report, but he was taken sick soon after, and the type is still in the original papers."

"What presses have you—I mean large ones?"

"One two-revolution Hoe, on which we print the Argus."

"And do you expect to run off this catalogue on it—five thousand impressions to each sixteen-page form—and print the paper, too?"

"I'll manage that, sir. If the paper interferes at any time I'll send it over to the Record pressroom."

"I shall require a contract, on which you must furnish a

guarantee that you will send me proofs of at least eight pages a day until the composition is finished."

"I'll agree to that, if you'll promise to return proofs within twenty-four hours after receipt by you."

"That's satisfactory. Who do you offer as a guarantor that you will fulfil your part of the contract?"

"Judge Smith."

"If Judge Smith will guarantee its performance I will give you the work—and all our printing, for that matter, which is considerable—for I am in favor of helping home industries, all things being even. The Times has been doing our small job work, but I have no particular interest in sending it to Bentley. I prefer to have one establishment do all our printing, if possible."

Frank picked up several news items on his way back to the office, where he found one of his father's old customers—one who had gone over to the Times—waiting to see him.

"I've come back to the old ranch again, young man," said the visitor.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Williams, and I hope we shall not lose you again. The Argus establishment is now under new management, and I guess I can give you satisfaction."

Mr. Williams gave a small order for job printing and left.

"Say, Frank, what do you think?" said Dan, coming in from the composing-room for a moment. "Bentley has fired Jinks from the Times office."

"No; is that a fact? Why, he's been there for years, and I understood he was a good printer."

"He's all right. It seems your man, Billings, who went to work there Saturday, made an offer to Bentley to take Jinks' place at two dollars a week less. Jinks is a union man, and of course don't work under the scale, which was all Bentley gave him as foreman, so he had to get out. It's a shame, for Jinks has a big family and is anchored in Green River."

"It's a mean piece of business on Billings' part; but nothing more than one might expect of him. Tell Jinks he can come to work here three days a week for the present. That will help you out, Dan, and give you a chance to attend to your outside work. I'll be able to give Jinks a steady position soon, as I am sure of getting that contract for the bolt and lock company's catalogue. We'll want at least four first-class all-around jobbers. Jinks can go on the stone, and a regular feeder on the cylinder for Gibson."

"Gee, Frank! I see you're going to wake the office up in great shape. Bentley will turn green with envy when he hears you've got that job. He's been wanting to do that catalogue himself; and he might have got it, only he was too mean to buy the type."

"It's lucky my father bought that six-point Ronaldson. I couldn't afford to lay in new type at this stage of the game, even to catch that catalogue."

"Did the manager make any objection to the price we figured on?" asked Dan.

"No. He said there would be something like one hundred and ninety-two pages this time, which, at \$3.50 per

page—that's twenty-five cents lower than the figures of the Chicago firm—will foot up \$672 for the composition. The presswork on twelve forms of sixteen pages, five thousand impressions, at fifty cents a token, will amount to \$120 or more. Total, \$792 for the job. The factory people will furnish the paper. I have figured the entire expense of producing the work to be less than \$400, so I should make a fine profit."

Jinks went to work the next morning.

It was a busy day at the Argus office, for the paper came out early on Wednesday morning.

Frank read all the proof, wrote a couple of editorials, and about two columns of other matter. This latter included a catchy announcement of the forthcoming show of the "On the Blink Company," billed at the opera house on Thursday evening.

His batch of exchanges furnished clippings for another two columns.

Then Dan Harwood furnished a column and a half of his own spicy copy, which was one of the first things that most of the Green River readers of the Argus had been accustomed to glance over when they opened their paper, the absence of this matter after Dan had been discharged by Mr. Jebb being one of the causes of the decline in the circulation of the paper.

Correspondence from the adjacent villages and various other communications took up three more columns, and the balance of the paper not occupied by advertisements was filled up with plate matter, furnished by the Chicago Newspaper Union, the cost of which was largely taken out in advertising space, which the company filled to suit itself.

Altogether, Mr. Jebb could not have improved on the Wednesday edition of the Argus, and many of Frank Morris' friends congratulated him upon the excellent start he had made.

That afternoon he signed a contract with the Green River Bolt and Lock Company for their catalogue; and he sent to Chicago for the sundry printing material he would require to aid in getting it out.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN WHICH FRANK PROPOSES A NEW SCHEME TO BOOM THE ARGUS.

There were several things that made Andrew Bentley, proprietor of the Times, mad before Saturday came around again.

The first was that the agent of the "On the Blink Company" had ignored his paper as an advertising medium, and had patronized the Argus and the Record instead.

The second was that the Argus had recovered several of its old-time advertisers which had withdrawn their patronage from that paper.

The third was the loss of Dan Harwood and his facile pen, not to speak of his adeptness as a compositor in the printing office.

And the worst of all was the fact that the Argus had

captured the printing of the annual catalogue of the Green River Bolt and Nut Company.

Billings, his new foreman, however, assured him that Frank Morris must be crazy to bid for the work, as his facilities were not equal to handling such a job.

"He'll find that he's only got himself in a hole. I guess I know what that office is capable of," said Billings, wagging his head sagely.

"You ought to, seeing you've worked there several months," replied Bentley.

"What does that kid know about printing, anyway?" said the foreman, with a sneer.

"Not much, I guess; but he's got young Harwood at his back. I didn't want to lose that fellow," grumbled the owner of the Times. "His local paragraphs were the best things I printed. People looked for 'em. Why, I've got a dozen letters from readers kicking because they are not in the Times any more. The circulation of my paper has been looking up ever since I put him to work here. And now he's gone back to the Argus again to help that boy editor get his paper out."

"What's the odds? The Argus won't last long under that young monkey; and then you will be able to get your man back again," said Billings, encouragingly.

"I don't know but you may be right," said Bentley, feeling a trifle better at this view of the situation. "I don't see how a mere boy of eighteen can publish a paper capable of holding its place against the Times. I've been an editor for twenty years, and what I don't know about running a paper isn't much."

"That's right," nodded Billings, who proposed to work his new job for all it was worth, and thought he understood the weak side of his boss. "Mr. Jebb said more than once in my hearing that the man who managed the Times knew his business from A to Z, and Mr. Jebb held the city desk on the Chicago Record before he came here. When Mr. Jebb says a man's good, he is good."

The satisfied smirk which came over Bentley's face showed that he felt the implied flattery of Billings' words.

He offered the new foreman a cheap cigar—one of the brand he smoked himself—which was an unheard-of piece of generosity on his part; for a nickel always looked as big as a cartwheel to him, notwithstanding the fact that he made a very good income from the Times.

While this conversation was in progress Frank Morris and Dan Harwood were also holding a pow-wow in the editorial sanctum of the Argus.

"There doesn't seem to be anything the matter with this issue of the paper, the first one I may say I have handled all by myself," said Frank, with a feeling of pride.

"I should think not," added Dan, vigorously. "I knew you were equal to the emergency, old fellow."

"Don't forget that much of the credit belongs to you. I don't believe I should have dared go into the thing if I had not been sure of your help."

"Oh, I'm not so much. I can write a little, and I can hustle like fun. That's about all I'm good for," grinned Harwood.

"You're all right, Dan. I wouldn't ask for a better assistant. Between us, I hope to accomplish all I started out to do."

"We'll do it, you bet your suspenders."

"I've got a few of our advertisements back in to-day's issue; but to keep up the good work I've got to put some fresh blood into our subscription list. Our circulation has dropped away nearly one-third since father had to give up the management. The best advertisers seem to know this, and I can't deny the truth, even to win a man's custom. It is up to me to get our old readers back, and as many new ones as I can. The question is, What is the quickest way to accomplish this? Mr. Jebb's methods permitted the Times to get the inside track of the Argus. I must get out of the rut into which he pushed us. Now, it struck me that, as that serial we've been using in plates finished with this issue, I might write something in that line myself—a story, for instance, that would attract attention from the start and set readers to guessing as to what would appear in our next."

"That isn't such a bad idea," grinned Dan. "You might open it with a murder mystery and offer a prize to the reader who would solve the problem before the last chapter was printed."

"Or I might write a story without a title and offer one hundred dollars for the best one suggested by a bonafide subscriber, to be printed over the last instalment," suggested Frank. "That would start a lot of people this way with their dollars on the chance of capturing the one hundred."

"Sure thing," grinned Dan. "You could announce the plan in Saturday's and several subsequent issues of the paper. If I were you I would put a small advertisement in the Woman's Magazine and two or three other papers of that class, in order to catch the attention of the general public. You'll find the rates high, as these monthlies have an enormous circulation; but the investment ought to be worth the money."

"A year's subscription would be altogether too much to ask on your plan, Dan; so I'll make a three months' subscription at fifty cents eligible to win the prize."

"That's right. You'll have to start the ball rolling right away. Send your advertisements out at once, and begin the publication of the story as soon as results begin to materialize. If you start it too soon you won't be able to fill orders for the back numbers the subscriptions will call for. In any case, you will have to provide a supply of extra copies of the earlier issues. This scheme is going to cost you some money at the start, but I think it is worth the risk."

"So do I," said the young editor, who was growing enthusiastic over the plan.

"Now, I've got an idea for Saturday's paper," said Dan, chuckling. "You know that old house down the river that's reputed to be haunted?"

"Yes," said Frank, turning an expectant eye on his assistant.

"Several people have told me within the last few days

that mysterious lights and noises have been seen and heard there of late. Farmer Jones had quite an experience on the road in front of it three nights ago. He says his horse was frightened and he himself nearly scared to death by a big white ghost that came out of the building and waved its bony arms at him. That's all bosh, you know; but you want to get up a sensational story about the place and ring in all the imaginative freaks you can think of, making the Jones incident very prominent. Throw in sundry mysterious hints, and say you think the case worthy of investigation by the Green River Psychological Society. I'll go down there to-night and see if I can pick up a few points for you."

"It isn't a bad idea," laughed Frank. "It'll start people to talking, and it may sell a few extra copies of the Argus."

"We want the people of this burg to understand that this paper is alive and kicking, in spite of Mr. Jebb and his friend Robinson, who certainly tried their best to put it asleep."

"I see that those two gentlemen are still hanging around the Neptune House—in expectation, I suppose, that we will soon go out of business. Mr. Jebb had the nerve to tell me that, in his opinion, I wouldn't last long."

"What else could you expect from him? If they're looking to see the red flag hung out our window, they'll have a long wait on their hands."

"You wouldn't think a man of Squire Roach's standing in the community would be guilty of such a conspiracy as he tried to work on the Argus."

"He's what you call a good hater. He couldn't forgive your father for giving his support to Farmer Gray last fall. He wants to be the whole thing in this town, but there happen to be others who stand on their own rights."

"If it was possible to bring the plot home to him, and show him up before the people as he deserves, the exposure would be a salutary lesson for him."

"If you could do that he'd find it beneficial to move to fresh pastures, I guess. The town would be too hot for him, even if he is a rich man and the president of the First National Bank."

"It would take Duncan down a peg or two, also. He puts on more airs than any boy in town."

"I was surprised to see him give you that order for visiting cards last Saturday," remarked Dan, who, of course, did not dream of Duncan's motive.

"He did it in a patronizing kind of way, to let me see how important he considered himself and how much superior socially he is to me."

"Oh, that was it, eh? Well, I must get a move on, or my joints will get rusty. Jinks is panning out all right in the composing-room, and expresses himself as being grateful to you for even three days' work a week. He's just the man to help me handle that catalogue when we get started with it. He's had considerable experience in that line in the best offices in Chicago. I consider him a valuable man."

"I'm glad we got him, then. I'd give something to know how Billings is getting on at the Times. I never saw a

man who could nurse a job better than he. I've no use for a printer of that stamp. Gibson told me that he had a lot of trouble with his forms. Type was continually pulling out and the leads showing up."

"You don't find anything like that after me," said Dan, earnestly. "Nor after Jinks, either. It's just as easy to do things right, if you understand your business, as to do them wrong. Nobody but a blacksmith slights his work."

"My sentiments exactly, Dan," said Frank. "Now I wish you'd go up to Foxglove & Towelcrash and see if they will give you the copy for that half-column advertisement they promised me for Saturday's paper."

"All right," said Harwood, with alacrity, and he left the inner room as though he had springs attached to his feet, while Frank drew a pad of manila paper toward him and started to turn out a batch of copy for the girls.

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH FRANK RECEIVES A NOTE BEARING THE SIGNATURE OF A YOUNG LADY IN WHOM HE IS GREATLY INTERESTED.

"The Mystery of the Benson House" was the heading of Frank Morris' story of the strange developments in the history of the reputed haunted mansion, which stood close to a bend in the Green River, three miles above the outskirts of the town.

The article attracted a great deal of notice, and as a consequence there was an unusual demand for Saturday's paper.

Duncan Roach read the story through with a sneer.

"I'll bet Dan Harwood wrote that, or put Frank Morris up to it," he muttered. "I wonder if he has any suspicions about Benson's? I think it about time the ghosts gave one or both of those fellows a roasting. It might take some of the freshness out of them," and Duncan grinned in a peculiar way, as if he knew more about the inside workings of the haunted house than appeared in the Argus.

Duncan met several of his chums later on, and the bunch went into convulsions of mirth over "The Mystery of the Benson House."

"The fellow who wrote that ought to be initiated into the society of the ghosts, don't you think?" suggested Duncan, meaningly.

"Without actually becoming one, you mean, don't you?" said the nephew of the cashier of the First National Bank, an under-sized, dudish boy named Peter Winch.

"Of course. The membership list of the Ancient Order of Associated Ghosts is full, but the first degree might occasionally be worked to advantage on inquisitive outsiders."

"It would make them smart, at any rate," spoke up Luke Edwards, with a sneer.

Which sally caused a roar of mirth.

"I move that Frank Morris, the boy editor of the Argus, be invited to attend our next roasting bee," said Duncan, with a grin.

"Second the motion," chuckled Winch.

"Those in favor of inviting the learned editor to our coming soiree will please signify it by saying aye," said Edwards, the self-constituted chairman of the crowd.

"The motion is unanimous. The chief executioner is instructed to see that a real hot fire is provided for the occasion, in order that our distinguished visitor may have no cause to complain of a lack of warmth in his reception."

This provoked another outburst of laughter.

"As our expected guest is a member of the unbridled press, it will be the duty of the custodian of records to prepare a true and unvarnished account of the proceedings of the evening, and furnish same to the editor of the Green River Times for publication, in order that the public may be further enlightened into the mysteries of the Benson house, which the Argus has seen fit to introduce to their attention this morning," said Walter Edwards, grandiloquently.

"Somebody will wish there was snow on the ground before the initiation is concluded," said Duncan, significantly.

"Or that he could sit on a cake of ice for the sake of variety," chimed in Eddie Hicks.

"Or take a swim in the river," suggested another youth of high social standing.

"But I say," asked Peter Winch, "s'pose he won't come?"

"Elsie Gray lives a mile further out that road," said Duncan. "A note of invitation from her will fetch him every time."

"How are you going to work that dodge? Elsie and you are on the outs."

"Pete's sister could write it. She isn't too sweet on Elsie, and would just as soon sign her name to a note as not. Morris won't know the difference, I'll bet. We'll watch for him down the road and run him into Benson's in double-quick time. When we get through with him he won't be in the humor to write any more ghost stories."

Peter Winch thought the idea a good one, and agreed to persuade his sister to help the good work along.

On Monday afternoon of the next week several letters were delivered by the postman at the Argus office.

Most of them contained local subscriptions to the paper, and some of them requests for further information concerning the new story without a title, which had been announced in the Saturday issue as a forthcoming novelty.

Judging from the first day's results, Frank Morris was encouraged to believe that the new idea would prove a success.

The last letter he opened, addressed in a neat, girlish hand, read as follows:

"Green River Farm, July 1, 190—.

"Dear Mr. Morris: My father having been called to Marshland, to be gone over night, mother and I would be happy to have you spend the evening at the Farm. I have special reasons for hoping you will not disappoint us. Please do come.

Yours sincerely,

"ELSIE GRAY."

Frank was not familiar with Elsie's handwriting, never having received a note from her before, and therefore he had no suspicions of the genuineness of that which he now held in his hand.

"I was going to commence my serial to-night," he said to himself, "but I guess it will have to wait. I couldn't think of disappointing Elsie for a great deal."

Indeed, he was highly delighted with the invitation, the more so as it was so unexpected.

He was, to tell the honest truth, very much interested in Farmer Gray's only daughter, who by many people was called the belle of Green River.

She was an uncommonly winsome little creature, and her relations with Frank were of the most cordial nature.

He had been much flattered by her call at the office a week before, and this fresh evidence of her friendship quite tickled him.

"Yes, I'll go, 'you bet your suspenders,' as Dan would say. I wouldn't miss it for a good deal."

Frank was in high spirits that afternoon, anyway, for he had succeeded in talking a couple of good advertisers into returning to the fold.

Besides that, Dan Harwood had corraled three good vendue notices on the way to the Times and piloted them to the Argus.

Added to which the job department was looking up in a way that put Dan and Jinks on their mettle to turn the stuff out on time.

Altogether, this week's editions and the other work promised a profit, instead of the usual loss of many weeks back; so it was natural that the youngest editor in Green River should feel particularly jubilant over the outlook.

"I shall not be back after supper to-night as I intended," said Frank to Dan, at closing-up time. "I'm going out to Farmer Gray's."

"I knew there must be some attraction to keep you away, bet your suspenders," grinned Dan, eyeing his friend quizzically.

Frank blushed in spite of himself.

"If I had as pretty a girl as Elsie Gray on the string I'd feel like shirking work myself for an hour or two," continued Harwood.

"It happens to be a special invitation, which I can't very well turn down," explained Frank.

"Sure!" chuckled Dan.

"Don't you believe me? Read that," and Frank handed him the note.

"You're a solid man in that quarter, bet your suspenders," said Dan, returning the note.

"What nonsense!"

"No nonsense at all. Her father owes his distinguished position as member from this county to the State Legislature to your father's backing. She appreciates the fact—see? You've got the inside track there. Hold on to it. Her father is rich. Green River Farm is the finest in the county. Some day, perhaps—"

"Dan," said Frank, with pretended severity, "it's time you went home. I'm going to supper."

CHAPTER X.

IN WHICH FRANK MORRIS GETS A ROASTING.

The Ancient Order of Associated Ghosts was a secret society lately instituted by Duncan Roach and half a dozen of his friends, all sons of well-to-do residents of Green River.

They met several times a week at the Benson house, the deserted and dilapidated building which had long enjoyed the unsavory reputation of being haunted, but which had no terrors for these young aristocrats.

The objects of the organization were several. One was to pool their spare cash and play the Chicago races through a certain well-known tipster; another was to raise Cain generally and throw the blame of their pranks on the reputed ghosts of the Benson house.

Thus the lights and mysterious noises which had of late startled the nerves of timid people in the neighborhood might be accounted for.

Farmer Jones' adventure had nearly ended in a serious mishap to that individual, but that circumstance did not in the least disturb the serenity nor interrupt the plans of the Ancient Order of Ghosts.

Even had the farmer been drowned in the river—a fate he barely missed—through the practical joke they played upon him, we doubt if it would have led these young thoroughbreds to see the error of their ways.

The initiation hinted at by Duncan Roach had no existence in fact, but was a suggestion of the moment.

His idea was to kidnap, or otherwise get possession of Frank Morris, and work some particularly painful and humiliating trick upon him in revenge for the various grudges he bore against the manly young fellow, particularly for the dressing-down Frank had administered to him for insulting Elsie Gray.

The scheme was practically unpremeditated up to the time of the appearance of the story of the haunted house in Saturday's Argus.

The first degree, or "roasting" ordeal, was an invention of Duncan Roach's to be applied at some future and indefinite occasion when an inquisitive visitor, not too large to be safely tackled by the ghosts, was caught nosing about their private stamping-grounds.

To roast Frank Morris, Duncan felt would be the greatest satisfaction of his life.

The members of the Ancient Order of Associated Ghosts met on Monday evening at seven o'clock, at the residence of Peter Winch, and proceeded in a body to the Benson house. They arrived there about a quarter of eight, and proceeded at once to don the regalia of the order—a long white gown, a stiff, conical night-cap, and a ghastly papier-mache mask.

There were seven of them altogether.

Three hid themselves near the house in the shadow of an old walnut tree, three posted themselves behind a fence on the opposite side of the road, while Duncan Roach himself stretched a line breast-high across the road.

Then the ghosts waited patiently for their victim to appear.

In five minutes they heard the gallop of a horse along the roadway, and presently a figure on horseback, which they could not distinguish in the gloom, appeared around the curve.

As he approached at a rapid gallop Duncan started into the middle of the road and threw up his hands.

This startled the animal, who pulled up quickly and reared on his haunches.

"Whoa! Whoa, Beauty!" exclaimed the voice of Frank Morris, who was not himself particularly disturbed by the ghost, whom he judged to be some practical joker.

Then the concealed ghosts rushed out from either side of the road and seized both horse and rider.

This was no joke, and Frank put up a lusty resistance, striking out with both of his fists.

One blow took Edwards in the eye, and he went down as if a horse had kicked him. Another landed on Eddie Hick's papier-mache nose so hard as to partially stun him.

But the odds were too great for Frank Morris to successfully cope against.

He was dragged from his stout pony's back; the animal was held by Duncan, who led her away and tied her to a post at the back of the house.

When he had returned to the scene Frank was being bound hand and foot by the crowd.

"What piece of nonsense is this?" demanded the young editor indignantly.

To this remark no attention whatever was paid.

The prisoner, now quite helpless, was lifted up and carried into a large back room in the building. This room overlooked the river, and a fire which had been kindled in a big, open fireplace was burning briskly.

The glare cast by the burning wood was the only illumination, and therefore added to the grotesqueness of the fantastic figures, who began a sort of wild Indian dance about their victim as he lay upon the bare floor.

"You don't imagine that you're going to frighten me with such tomfoolery as this, do you?" demanded Frank, thoroughly disgusted with the proceedings.

The dance stopped, and all the ghosts except Duncan Roach drew back and ranged themselves in solemn silence against the wall.

"Frank Morris," said Duncan, in an assumed voice, "you are about to be initiated as an honorable member of the Ancient Order of Associated Ghosts. This honor has been tendered to you in consideration of the remarkable and graphic story you wrote for and published in the Argus last Saturday."

"Associated donkeys, you mean, I guess," replied Frank angrily, for he did not relish his undignified position. "I advise you to go slow if you don't want to get into trouble. A joke is a joke, and I can take one as well as the next fellow; but I'm not feeling in the humor for horseplay this evening. I've got an engagement."

At this a roar of laughter went up from the assembled Ghosts.

"Exactly," said Duncan, in hoarse tones; "you're keeping it now."

"Are you going to let me go?" demanded Frank.

"Sure; after you've been initiated," answered Duncan, who forgot himself and spoke in his natural tones, which Frank immediately recognized.

"Oh, ho! You are Duncan Roach," he said.

The squire's son bit his lips with chagrin, as he had not intended that Morris should identify him.

"Never mind who I am," he said, surlily. "It won't do you any good to know. Associated Ghosts," addressing his companions, "are we all ready to proceed with the initiation of the distinguished editor of the Green River Argus?"

"We are!" shouted the six as with one voice, in hollow tones.

"Is the fire hot?"

"It is hot!" solemnly replied the Ghost who was attending to it.

"Let the guest of the evening be bound to the gridiron!" commanded Duncan, with a wave of his right arm.

A roughly-made wooden frame, oblong in shape, to which was nailed a dozen or more cross-pieces, was brought forward.

Frank was placed face down upon it and bound to the cross-sections.

"Let the gridiron be placed in position!" ordered Duncan.

The six ghosts raised the framework to a vertical position and then advanced close to the fireplace, where the full glow of heat would strike on the victim's back.

Then they propped it up so that it would stand, and returned to the wall as before.

"Associated Ghosts, the Ordeal of the Roast has begun. We will sing a hymn of praise while the cook stirs the fire."

A most unearthly chant was instantly begun, while all eyes were turned upon the boy, who was now beginning to realize that his situation was by no means a joke, so far, at least, as he was concerned.

"Do you mean to torture me, Duncan Roach?" he demanded vehemently, as he felt the heat of the fire penetrating his garments in a very unpleasant manner.

The chant continued.

"You boys can't be aware of what you are doing," said Frank, squirming uneasily as much as his bonds would permit.

"Is he cooking?" asked Duncan of Peter Winch, who was attending to the fire.

"Doing beautifully," was the reply.

"Does he want basting yet?"

"I think he does."

Duncan grabbed a flat piece of board, which he placed against Frank's back and legs, moving it slowly up and down, while a malicious smile spread over the freckled face under the mask.

This caused the heated cloth to press closely on the flesh,

intensifying the pain the young editor was already beginning to endure.

In spite of his best efforts, he could not repress a groan of anguish.

"The guest of the evening is acknowledging the warmth of his reception," mocked Roach.

"Great Scott! Duncan Roach, you are burning me!" exclaimed Frank, beads of perspiration standing out on his forehead.

"No; we are only roasting you. You will soon be done to a turn."

"Let me go, will you? This is pure torture!" and Frank struggled harder than ever, the frame shaking beneath his desperate efforts to free himself.

"You are not browned yet. You will need another basting."

As Duncan applied the board again Frank uttered a thrilling cry, which startled the other Ghosts—but not Duncan, whose spite was urging him on.

"Let him go!" said Walt Edwards, a bit nervously.

"Mind your own business, will you?" said Duncan, angrily.

"Yes, let up on him. He's been roasted enough," put in Eddie Hicks, who was of the opinion that matters had gone far enough.

"Shut up!" growled Duncan, pressing the board against Frank's legs.

"Oh, heavens!" cried the boy, in a spasm of agony. "I can't stand this!"

He threw all his strength into a frantic effort to burst his bonds, but he was too firmly lashed to the framework to be able to help himself.

The Ghosts were beginning to grow nervous over the situation, and two of them started forward to the boy's aid; but Duncan pushed them back.

Walt Edwards, angry at the shove, struck Duncan square in the mask.

He staggered against the frame, and Morris would have been precipitated into the fire but for Edwards, who gave it a quick push to one side.

It tilted over with Frank and fell clear of the blaze, one end of it sliding in front of Duncan's feet, who tripped over it.

Before a hand could be raised to save him he pitched head-first into the fire, scattering the burning embers right and left.

Duncan gave a shriek of agony as his two arms were thrust forward into the burning mass and his masked face struck the hot hearthstone.

Winch, with great presence of mind, seized and dragged him from his dangerous position, but not before Duncan's white gown had caught fire in several places.

As it was, he was sadly burned about the arms and his face was painfully scorched.

In the meanwhile two of the ghosts were cutting Frank loose.

He writhed about in intense pain as their hands touched his body, for there was not an inch of his back or legs that

did not smart and sting him dreadfully after the ordeal he had undergone.

The rest of the boys rushed to Duncan to extinguish the fire, which was spreading over his white gown.

But, with a shriek of pain and terror, he jumped to his feet, dashed open the back door, and sprang down the bank toward the water.

"Catch him!" shouted Edwards. "The fool will be drowned, for he can't swim!"

CHAPTER XI.

IN WHICH FRANK TAKES A MANLY REVENGE ON DUNCAN ROACH.

The whole crowd rushed out of the building after the frenzied Duncan, leaving Frank to his own devices.

But that manly fellow had caught sight of his blazing enemy as he fled from the room, and, realizing that Duncan's situation was a critical one, he forgot all about his own pain and smarting, and followed the rest, with the idea of lending a helping hand, if necessary, to save the boy who had tortured him so severely.

Duncan had jumped into the river, the rapid current of which was carrying him away from the shore.

His strangely attired companions shouted to him and gesticulated frantically; but not even Edwards, the coolest-headed fellow in the party, made an effort to swim out to his aid.

Every one of them knew that the river was dangerous at this point, and self-preservation was the first thought with each.

Not so Frank Morris.

It was the work of a moment to cast aside his jacket and shoes and plunge into the stream.

Taking note of the position of Duncan, who appeared to be going under for the second time, he swam sturdily forward, breasting the water with sinews of steel.

The other boys, many of whom had by this time discarded their queer rig, encouraged him with shouts of approbation.

"Hi, hi! He's come up! A little bit further to the right, Morris!" cried Peter Winch.

"Look out for that sunken rock out there, Morris!" shouted another, warningly.

"You're a dandy, old chap!"

"By George," exclaimed Walt Edwards, enthusiastically, "Frank Morris is a fine fellow, after all! I feel meaner than dirt to think I've had a hand in his roasting."

"Same here," said Eddie Hicks. "Duncan had so much to say against him that I thought he was a little prig. Now look at him! Going out yonder in his condition to save Roach from drowning!"

"That's right!" chipped in Spencer Lickett. "If a fellow had served me as Duncan did, I'd think a long time before I'd risk my skin to pull him out of a hole."

Duncan was going under for the fatal third time when Frank grasped him by the collar of his coat, where it showed through a hole in his robe, and the half drowned boy tried to seize him in his wild struggle for life.

But Frank was perfectly cool, and saw his danger in time to avoid it.

He held on to Duncan and began to push him shoreward, the other boys continuing to follow them down the bank, keeping pace with the current which bore them away.

Presently their attention was attracted by a sudden glare behind.

"Jumping Jupiter!" cried Winch. "The Benson house is on fire!"

And so it was.

The burning embers which had been scattered about the room when Duncan made his involuntary dive into the fireplace were producing unexpected results.

The haunted house was evidently doomed.

"Say," asked Edwards, "where did Duncan tie Morris' horse?"

"Give it up!" answered Hicks, looking a bit startled.

"It won't do to have the animal burned up, after what Morris is doing for Duncan. I'm going back," and Edwards started for the blazing building.

"I'll go with you," volunteered Hicks.

They set off at a run, and presently arrived at the scene of the conflagration.

The pony was standing where Duncan had secured her bridle to the post at the corner of the house, but was becoming restive, as if aware of her peril.

It did not take more than the fraction of a minute for Edwards to unhitch and lead the horse out of harm's way.

"That's the end of the haunted house," remarked Hicks, as they stood aloof and watched the flames eating through the dry timber.

"And the last of the Ancient Order of Ghosts, too," said Walt.

"Oh, I don't know about that," objected Hicks. "But I won't stand for any more roasting seances."

"I should say not."

"Duncan carried things altogether too far to-night. He has a personal grudge against Morris, and tried to get square with him. It was all very funny at first; but when I saw the fellow was actually suffering I thought it time to make a kick."

"I suppose I'm responsible for this fire, as well as Roach's pickle."

"How do you make that out?" asked Eddie.

"If I hadn't hit him that time the trouble wouldn't have occurred. But he made me mad by the manner he pushed me out of the way when we stepped up to help Morris, just as if he was the whole thing and the rest of us so much dirt. He isn't so much, by a jugful, and I guess the fellows will be kind of shy of him after this."

"I shouldn't be surprised. To tell you the honest truth, I'm sick of the frills he puts on. Frank Morris may not be our equal socially, but he's the kind of fellow I'd like to cotton to. I've sided against him all along because I believed those yarns of Duncan's. But it's my opinion that he was lying right along."

"I dare say Roach can twist the truth to suit his pur-

pose. Let's lead the horse down after the rest of the push. Morris ought to have Duncan ashore by this time."

Frank Morris brought the almost unconscious Duncan Roach to the river bank nearly half a mile below the Benson house, which was now on fire from cellar to roof, furnishing a fine bonfire, which illuminated the countryside and attracted general attention in the town.

"Kneel down here, one of you fellows," said Frank energetically, after Duncan had been lifted out of the water, "and the rest of you give him a roll. He may have swallowed some of the river water, and the quicker you get it out of him the better."

This suggestion was at once carried out, and the luckless heir of the Roach estates was treated to a rough-and-ready shaking-up, which brought him to his senses after a little while.

It was a warm night, and the ducking did not greatly inconvenience Morris. He simply removed his garments, and, with the assistance of one of the boys, wrung them out as dry as possible and put them on again.

"I'll have to let my engagement go to-night," said Frank. "I was going out to Farmer Gray's, but you lads have knocked that in the head for me. I am sorry, as it means that I have to disappoint a young lady."

"Don't worry about that," said Peter Winch, with a grin. "That engagement was a put-up job on our part to decoy you out here to-night."

"I got my sister to write the note you received with Elsie Gray's name tacked to it. She didn't know what I intended doing with it, so you can't blame her. Duncan suggested the plan, and I put it in force."

"Kind of a mean trick all around that you've played on me, don't you think?" said Frank, indignantly. "My back feels as raw and sore as though it were covered with boils. I don't expect to get over your treatment for a week."

"What's done can't be undone," replied Winch, apologetically. "We didn't mean to carry matters so far. Duncan kind of engineered the racket, for he's had it in for you this long time. The rest of us, I guess, are willing to make it up to you any way you say, if you won't give the affair to the public."

"It's easy enough for you fellows to apologize now. You haven't any idea of the torment I suffered during those last minutes, especially when your leader pressed my clothes against my skin," and Frank shuddered at the bare recollection. "It was simply terrible. I shall have some idea, after this, of the tortures of the Spanish Inquisition."

"Well, it's up to you to say what you're going to do about it," put in Walt Edwards, who, with Hicks, had just led up Frank's horse. "We're in it up to our necks, and you've recognized most of us by this time. If you press a charge against us we'll go to jail. It will serve us right, of course, but it will be rather hard on our folks, that's all."

"Most anybody would make you sweat for the kind of treatment you've handed out to me," said Frank resolutely. "But I'm willing to believe you fellows didn't intend to

harm me, and that most of what I suffered is due to Duncan Roach. As he has suffered, and will suffer more yet, from the looks of his arms, I may not let this thing go any further; but you've got to promise me that you'll quit such kind of larks in the future. If I hear of any more I'll give you all a roast in the paper that you won't like."

"All right," said Walt Edwards; "let it go at that. Furthermore, I think it is only right that each of us agree to get you five subscribers and one good advertisement for the Argus, in recognition of the square way you are treating us. If Duncan doesn't do twice as much for you after what you've done for him we'll cut him dead."

"No," said Frank; "I won't accept a favor from Duncan Roach. He treated me like a savage to-night, and I've got square by saving his life. If the rest of you want to do as Walter Edwards has proposed, I'll accept it as an evidence of your good will. That's all there is to it. Now I'm going home. I thank you, Edwards, for bringing me my pony. I wouldn't have had her injured for a farm. I wish you all good-night."

CHAPTER XII.

IN WHICH PROSPERITY BEGINS TO SET TOWARD THE GREEN RIVER ARGUS.

Frank Morris' face wore a grim smile as he approached the blazing ruins of the Benson house, which he had to pass on his way back to Green River.

Probably a dozen curious people had assembled in bunches at a safe distance to view the conflagration and speculate as to the cause of it.

"This will make another good story for the Argus," said a man who had recognized the young editor. "Being on the ground yourself, you will have the bulge on the Times."

Frank nodded pleasantly as he reined in his pony and dismounted to ease the intense smarting of his thighs, which the motion of riding had increased to an almost unbearable degree.

"Some tramp must have started the fire unwittingly," remarked the man.

"No," said another spectator, with a humorous twinkle in his eyes, "the ghosts did it because the Argus showed them up Saturday, and they wouldn't stand for it."

"That's right," said Frank, without a smile. "The spooks who haunted yonder house lately were known as the 'Ancient Order of Associated Ghosts,' and while they were holding a kind of high-jinks here to-night they set the place afire by accident. Now they'll have to look up another haunted house."

"Haw, haw, haw!" laughed both men. "That's pretty good."

"You speak as if you knew all about it," grinned the first man who had addressed Frank.

"I ought to, seeing they invited me out here to report the proceedings for my paper."

"That's pretty good, too," snickered the other man.

"What's pretty good?" inquired a third spectator, joining the little group.

The other repeated Frank's remarks for his enlightenment, and the newcomer said the young editor certainly ought to report the item in his best style.

"I mean to," replied Morris. "Nothing of importance gets by me."

"You young newspaper fellows have got great imaginations," said the third man, with a grin, as he slapped Frank on the back.

"Ouch!" shouted the boy, hopping almost a foot and making half a dozen different kinds of faces.

"What's the matter with you?" asked the man who had caused the trouble, while the other two looked at Frank with surprise.

"Don't do that again, please," said the boy, in unmistakably earnest tones. "If you had gone through the roasting I did to-night at the hands of the Associated Ghosts you'd kick yourself."

"Associated humbugs!" retorted the other, contemptuously. "You don't suppose you can cram any such rot as that down our throats, do you?"

"If you had my back you'd know whether it was rot or not."

"What's the matter with your back?" asked the man curiously.

"Go over to that fire and stand there for ten minutes, and you'll know what's the matter with it."

"I guess you're joking, young man."

"All right; have your own way," and the boy started to lead his horse homeward. "If you want to learn all about this fire don't miss Wednesday's Argus."

"I certainly will look to see something unusually funny on the subject," the man shouted after him.

Hardly had Morris disappeared around the turn in the road when six boys came along, escorting a seventh, who looked as if he had been through a threshing machine.

"Hello!" said one of the three men. "Here's another chap that looks as if he'd been up against the 'Associated Ghosts,' as Morris calls them."

The three spectators grinned broadly.

"Who are you laughing at?" snarled Duncan, who noticed that the men were grinning.

"We were laughing at you, if you want to know," said the third man, coolly.

"Well, don't do it!" snorted Roach, feeling mad all over. "What do you take me for?"

"We take you for a pretty badly bunged-up boy. What's happened to your face and hands? And you look as if you had been in the water, too."

"It's none of your business what's happened to me, or whether I've been in the water or not," retorted Duncan, in the same ugly tone.

"It won't do you any good to get mad over it. We didn't know but the ghosts who set the haunted house afire had roasted you, too."

The three men laughed again, and the six boys looked at each other in surprise.

"You go to grass!" growled Duncan, starting off down the road, his companions following.

"What the dickens could that fellow have meant?" asked Walt Edwards, looking at Eddie Hicks.

"You've got me," replied his friend.

"It was a funny remark to make, all the same," said Edwards, scratching his head. "One might almost imagine he knew something about what's been going on at Benson's before the old thing took fire."

"Not likely," said Eddie. "Merely a chance remark."

"They riled Duncan, all right," snickered Spencer Lickett.

"You don't blame him, do you? Think of the way he feels! I wouldn't have his dose for a farm. We'll have to steer him into a drug store and have him fixed up before we take him home."

And they did as soon as they got to town.

Wednesday's Argus had a column and a half on the first page about the destruction of the haunted house on Monday night, and the Ancient Order of Associated Ghosts received a humorous roasting, which, however, was only intelligible to the young fellows who had participated in the mad prank which led up to the fire.

Frank was careful to cast the mantle of fiction about his story, so that no one not in the secret would suspect the true facts in the case.

The young chaps themselves had got a hustle on, and had procured thirty new subscribers and six five-dollar advertisements for the Argus. This was as Walt Edwards had proposed, and Morris assured them that he entertained no hard feelings over the affair, though his poor back still gave him many a twinge as a reminder of the eventful occasion.

Dan Harwood had set up a large handbill, and employed several small boys to paste it on all the vacant walls and fences throughout the immediate neighborhood of Green River.

It read as follows:

"Are you looking for easy money? Buy the Argus and see what a simple matter it is to make one hundred dollars."

Squire Roach saw it and sneered at it.

So did Mr. Jebb and his friend Robinson, who thought they knew how to make one hundred dollars easier than that.

So did Bentley of the Times, and his foreman, Billings, who saw nothing good in anything that issued from the Argus office.

But hundreds of the good people of Green River read it, and many were impressed by it.

Regular readers of the Argus were already on the tip-toe of expectation about the advertised story without a title, and probably three-quarters of them expected to make a try for that one hundred dollars.

A title is such a simple thing, you know, that anybody thinks he can make one to fit any story.

And so he can, after a fashion.

The problem is to make one which fits the subject like a glove.

And if it is a competition, like the Argus scheme, to make a title that fits better than any one else's.

Then it is like picking up money.

Everybody interested in Green River figured it out that way, and those who were not already subscribers hastened to send their half dollars for a trial three months' subscription in order to get in line.

That is why the cash began to come Frank Morris' way during those early July days; and by the time that he had collected all that was in sight in the county the Woman's Magazine, and other monthlies in which he had advertised, came out, and what Frank called "foreign" subscriptions began to flow in the direction of the Argus office.

In the meantime the job department had also got busy on the bolt and lock catalogue.

Eight first-class jobbers had been secured and sent on from Chicago Typographical Union, No. 16, and things began to hum, much to the disgust of the proprietor of the Times, who saw his preeminence as the first printer in Green River slowly but surely slipping away from him.

After Frank had talked several of his best customers away Mr. Bentley began to cut prices.

Frank Morris immediately appealed to the people to support the fair and square principles of organized labor.

Every one of his jobs bore the union label, and every one was a sample of first-class workmanship.

The Argus itself was much better printed than the Times ever had been.

And the public was of the opinion that it was much the better edited of the two.

And the result of it all was that an intense and bitter rivalry sprang up between the two papers.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH SQUIRE ROACH FINDS OUT THAT MR. JEBB IS BOSS OF THE SITUATION.

Two months had elapsed since Frank Morris had taken charge of the Argus, and the change for the better was so marked as to leave little doubt in the mind of Squire Roach that his well-planned scheme to get possession of the paper was a dismal failure.

Not only that, but he recognized the fact that he had placed himself in an unenviable position through his secret dealing with Mr. Jebb, who thereby had acquired a hold upon him, which he had made use of by demanding a weekly salary and expenses, both for himself and Mr. Robinson, pending a more definite settlement.

But as week after week slipped by and the Argus appeared to be slowly but surely recovering its lost ground, and the chance of a sheriff's sale of the property more and more remote, the squire began to grow worried.

He had several interviews with Mr. Jebb, but they amounted to nothing.

That astute gentleman, having convinced himself that he held Squire Roach's reputation in the palm of his hand, was satisfied to live on the fat of the land without the necessity of hustling for a living; and his associate, Mr. Robinson, was of the same mind.

At last Squire Roach threw up his hands and advised his confederates to leave for Chicago, as he did not see his way clear any longer to employ them as he had contemplated.

"Why not revert to your original idea of starting a new paper?" said Mr. Jebb, with the tranquillity of a man who knew he would not have to foot the bills.

"The risk would be altogether too great, with the Argus in the field," replied the squire, shaking his head.

"But you are in honor bound to provide for both myself and Mr. Robinson, whom I induced to come here from Chicago to further your interests."

"I think I have done very handsomely by you both for the last two months. You and Mr. Robinson have boarded at my expense at the Neptune House during that time, and in addition I have paid you a weekly stipend."

"And now that things have failed to come your way you propose to cut us off without the proverbial shilling—is that it?"

"I expect to pay your way to Chicago, as well as furnish transportation for your friend. To this I will add one hundred dollars for yourself and fifty dollars for Mr. Robinson."

"You don't take me for a fool, do you, squire?" Mr. Jebb said, as he lit a cigar and settled back in his chair.

"What do you mean, Mr. Jebb?" asked Squire Roach, haughtily.

"I mean this: You hired me to do a job of dirty work, which I carried out to the letter. My reward was to be a steady and lucrative position. It is no fault of mine that your plans have gone astray. Since it is out of your power, you say now, to furnish me with the position, why, I think it is up to you to hand me a reasonable equivalent in cash—say, five thousand dollars."

"What!" roared the banker, growing as red as a beet at what he considered the insolence of the proposal.

"Five thousand dollars, I said—and fifteen hundred additional for Mr. Robinson."

"What do you take me for, sir?" roared the squire hotly.

"A sensible man, I hope," said Mr. Jebb, coolly. "If Mr. Robinson and I were to sign an affidavit setting forth the true facts of our business relations with you, Squire Roach, and we were to transmit the same to Mrs. Morris, I think your usefulness as a member of this community would suffer a serious eclipse."

"Do you mean to tell me to my face that you would dare to do such a thing?" vociferated Squire Roach, with a violent thump on the floor with his cane.

"Such a contingency is not impossible in the event of you refusing to hand over the two sums mentioned," replied Mr. Jebb, calmly blowing out a cloud of tobacco smoke.

"Do you intend to blackmail me, you scoundrel?" roared the rich man.

"Not at all. I was merely suggesting the only way you can make a settlement with us that will sidetrack unpleasant results."

"You are a rascal, sir!" howled the irate banker.

"It is possible there are a pair of us. The scheme was yours—not mine. The inducement was all on your side. If I am a rascal, so are you."

"How dare you talk to me in that strain?" sputtered the squire, who saw he could not palliate the part he had taken in the conspiracy.

"Because I don't recognize any difference between us, so far as this affair is concerned."

"I regret having had any business dealings with a man of your stamp," said the big banker.

"I have no doubt you do; but since you saw fit to inveigle me——"

"Inveigle you, sir?"

"Precisely. Since you have done so, you will have to face the music. You will save a lot of unnecessary bother by signing a check for six thousand five hundred dollars now, and close up the transaction."

Squire Roach's reply as he jumped to his feet would scarcely bear printing.

He shook his fist in the face of the imperturbable Mr. Jebb and flounced out of the hotel room where the interview had taken place.

Mr. Jebb grinned placidly, threw the butt of his cigar out of the window, and went downstairs to find Robinson and engage in a game of billiards.

Squire Roach went home in no very amiable mood.

He let himself in with his private latch-key and proceeded at once to his library.

"The infernal rascal!" he muttered, as he threw himself into an easy chair. "He has me on the hip. I must either accede to his demand or face a public exposure. Is there not some way I can circumvent that rascal?"

It was not a pleasant evening.

It was intensely dark and gusty.

The gloomy sky threatened a fall of rain at any moment.

It was a propitious night for dark enterprises, and perhaps it influenced the squire's subsequent actions.

One by one the lights were extinguished in the mansion as the inmates severally retired to sleep, but still the dim glow of the brass lamp in the banker's study burned on.

He had not moved apparently for an hour; but now, when the handsome ormolu clock on the mantel struck midnight, he stirred and finally got up.

For another hour he paced slowly and moodily up and down the velvet carpet, pausing occasionally by the window to look out into the dismal night.

A few drops of rain pattered at intervals on the window-panes, and every once in a while a big lilac bush which stood near the corner of the library would flop against the glass, and the sound would make the squire start nervously.

One o'clock chimed from the clock.

Squire Roach, as if actuated by a sudden resolve, walked over to a closet, from which he took an old coat and a soft brown hat.

Donning these, he softly let himself out of the house and took his way in the direction of the Neptune House. He did not go along the regular thoroughfare, but by by-

ways and back streets, where he met nobody abroad at that hour of the night.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN WHICH MR. JEBB AND HIS FRIEND ROBINSON OWE THEIR LIVES TO FRANK MORRIS.

It was nearly two o'clock that same night when Dan Harwood finished making up, under Frank Morris' directions, the last form of the *Argus*, which had to go to press at four.

A couple of twists with the key to the Hemphill quoins and the job was done.

"We can go home now, Dan, and I'm mighty glad of it. What with the paper, a fair run of job work and that catalogue, we're having a lively time of it these days."

"That's what we are," nodded Harwood, as he walked over to the sink to wash up.

"We have quite a lot of advertisements in this issue," remarked Frank. "Walt Edwards' father is getting to be a regular advertiser. That's another of Bentley's customers we have got."

"Spencer Lickett introduced me to his uncle this morning," Frank added, as Dan's face emerged from the towel. "He keeps a big hardware store on Norcross street. I had quite a talk with him, and he promised me his printing."

"Who's been doing it—Bentley?"

"No; the Record office."

"You want to look over your foundry specimen book and pick out a few new faces. Now that we're doing the work, we want to keep right up with the times. I don't mean the *Times* paper," with a grin. "Bentley would have a fit if Billings asked him to invest in a new job series. You get a few up-to-date job letters on top of what we've already got, and we'll soon have Bentley beaten to a standstill."

"We've got him on the run as it is. He's reduced his prices on job work twenty-five per cent," said Frank, as Dan locked the outside door after they had come out on the cheerless street.

"So I heard Jinks say. By the way, Bentley has been trying to get Jinks to go back to him."

"Has he?" replied the young editor, as they walked up the street. "What does Jinks think about it?"

"He hasn't any use for Bentley, after the way he was turned down. It was a scurvy trick of Bentley's, and Jinks won't forget it in a hurry."

"I shouldn't want to lose him, as he's a good, faithful worker," said Frank.

"No fear of you losing him. You treated him white when Bentley threw him out on his uppers, and Jinks appreciates that, and will stick by you as long as you are willing to employ him. He told me so."

"You can tell him his job is steady."

The boys turned up Edgecomb street, which led past the rear of the Neptune House.

This was a small, old-fashioned hostelry, built in Green River when it was a mere village, and was a straggling, two-story structure, various wings having been added as the patronage increased with the growth of the town.

Mr. Jebb and his friend occupied an isolated room at the extreme end of the more ancient part.

There were two windows in the room, one of which, directly above a tall, covered water-butt, was wide open, in spite of the threatening weather.

"I wonder what that ladder is doing there on top of the water-butt? Anybody could get into the house through that window with all the ease imaginable," said Frank, calling Dan's attention to the circumstance.

"Sure they could; and anybody who wanted to skip out without paying his bill could slip down that way without the least bother," grinned Harwood.

Just at that moment a ponderous form appeared, backing out of the window, which the person softly shut and then descended to the water-butt.

Removing the ladder, he let it slip to the ground, and thus completed the rest of his journey with ease.

"Well, bust my suspenders!" exclaimed Dan, as the two boys came to a halt alongside the picket fence and watched the performance with not a little astonishment. "Talk of Old Nick and you're almost sure to catch sight of his horns."

The big man who had emerged from Mr. Jebb's room in such a clandestine manner at that early hour in the morning stood for a moment while he shook his fist up at the window, and then hastily walked toward the back gate, near which the boys stood.

As he pushed it open Dan jumped forward and seized him by the arm.

"What were you doing——" began the young printer, in a loud tone.

But that was as far as he got.

The stout man gave a violent start, turned full on Dan, and struck him a heavy blow in the face, knocking the boy down.

Then he pushed the gate to with a bang and hurried up the street as fast as he could go.

"Are you hurt, Dan?" asked Frank, assisting his friend to rise.

Harwood seemed to be dazed, and he stood a moment looking blankly at Frank.

"Who do you suppose that was?" he gasped out, in a jerky kind of way.

"How should I know?" replied Morris. "I didn't get a square look at him. His hat was pulled down over his eyes and his coat was humped up about his ears."

"Well, if Squire Roach hasn't got a double in this town, that was he, all right."

"He's got away, whoever he is," said Frank.

"Where did he go?"

"He cut around the corner as if he had wheels on his feet."

"I've a great mind to chase the rascal, whoever he is," said Dan, doggedly.

At that moment Frank gave a gasp and clutched Harwood by the shoulder.

"Look there!" he exclaimed, pointing at the closed win-

dow through which the man had just made his exit. "I do believe the room is on fire."

A bright, suspicious-looking glare shone through the panes.

"The place is on fire, Dan!" cried Morris, excitedly. "Cut around the building and alarm the night clerk. I'll get up there by means of that ladder and see if I can put it out."

Harwood obeyed Frank's order, while Morris followed him inside the fence, got on to the water-butt, and pulling up the ladder, placed it under the window where they had first seen it.

As soon as his face reached above the level of the sill he saw the flames creeping up the bed-clothes of both the beds, each of which had an occupant who lay as still and unconscious of his danger as a log.

Frank dashed the window up and shouted loudly at the sleepers.

But not a move came from them—no more than if they had been dead.

The fire, fanned by the draught, gained headway every instant, so Frank saw he would have to take more energetic action.

He crawled in at the window, and shook first one and then the other roughly.

The clothes fell away from their faces.

"Good gracious!" cried the boy. "It is Mr. Jebb and Mr. Robinson!"

He shook them again.

"Wake up! The room and beds are on fire!"

Still they lay like mere inanimate images.

"They can't be dead!" gasped the boy. "No; they are breathing. I can't imagine what ails them. I must get them out of this."

First he grabbed Robinson, and pulled him over to the window.

Then, after a deal of trouble, he got him down to the top of the water-butt.

He rushed back for Mr. Jebb, who lay almost in a bed of fire by this time.

He got him out the same way.

By this time there were steps and voices in the passage outside the room.

The door was burst open, and then the alarm was given with a will.

Guests began to turn out of their beds, and servants in all kinds of undress hurried out into the yard.

Dan came out of a lower door and helped Frank land Messrs. Jebb and Robinson on the solid earth.

They were just as unconscious as ever.

"Can any one guess what's the matter with these men?" asked Frank, as a crowd gathered about them.

Nobody could, but the yardman—who had managed to get into a pair of trousers before he left his room—suggested sending for the doctor who lived across the street.

The physician was aroused and brought to the scene just as one of the local fire companies dashed up.

The room by this time was a mass of flames, and the whole wing was threatened with destruction.

The firemen got busy, assisted by some of the hotel help.

Mr. Jebb and his friend Robinson, still unconscious, were carried across the street by the firemen's orders, and there the doctor examined them.

"There must be something the matter with them," said Frank, "or the hauling about I gave them would have brought them to their senses long ago."

"There is," said the physician, in a serious voice; "these men have been drugged."

CHAPTER XV.

IN WHICH FRANK SCORES A "BEAT" ON THE TIMES AND HAS ANOTHER VISIT FROM ELSIE GRAY.

From the fact that both Mr. Jebb and Mr. Robinson were undressed, and Frank Morris had found them in bed, it was evident that they had been chloroformed in their sleep.

As the bed-clothes had been set on fire, it seemed to be a clear case of attempted murder.

The unconscious newspaper men were taken into the physician's office to be revived.

By this time the fire department had turned a couple of streams on the burning section of the Neptune House, and before long the fire was under control.

Frank Morris' heroic action in rescuing the two men from certain death was canvassed by the crowd of spectators who had gradually gathered in the neighborhood and passed from mouth to mouth.

By degrees the knowledge of the condition of the rescued men spread, and of course this added an element of mystery to the affair.

Neither Frank nor Dan said a word about what they had seen previous to the discovery of the fire.

That the big man, whom Harwood maintained to be the counterpart of Squire Roach, was at the bottom of the crime, was the opinion of both boys.

"We can't do any good here," whispered Frank to his associate. Then, with the instinct of the born newspaper man, he added, hurriedly:

"We must get back to the office at once and get this story into the paper. We have just time to do it."

The gas once more flared up in the editor's sanctum and the composing-room of the Argus.

"I'll leave you to get up a scare-head," said Frank, "while I get some copy under way."

"All right," said Dan; "but, first of all, give me a lift on the stone with this form. The story will go on the first page, of course."

"Certainly," said Frank, as Dan pushed the big chase toward him.

The young editor gave his assistant the needed lift, and then hastened to get down to work; while Harwood seized a double-column stick and started to set up the sensational head that had been determined upon.

Having finished this part of the work, he went inside and got the two pieces of copy already prepared by Frank,

and soon the type was dropping with a click into his thirteen-em stick.

In half an hour Frank finished the article and took up a stick—for he was a passable compositor himself—to help Dan out.

The proof was pulled, read, and corrected; and the next thing was to get it into the form.

While Harwood was unlocking the first page, which was divided from the eighth—which contained only advertisements and some plate matter—by a cross-bar, Gibson, the pressman, came in.

"You people seem to be behind this morning," he remarked, with a grin.

"Don't you believe it," replied Dan. "We finished up two hours ago. But there has been a fire in the Neptune House—you'll find the particulars in that proof—and having such a 'beat' over the Times, of course we came back to work it into the paper."

"Oh!" answered Gibson, taking up the proof-slip and reading it.

The new matter was gauged, and Frank indicated what to hold over and what to 'kill' in order to make room for it.

"You had quite an adventure, didn't you?" said Gibson, putting down the proof. "It seems to be a matter for the police. The big stranger you mention appears to be the guilty party."

"That's what he is," said Dan, as he lifted a handful of type into the form.

There was a big run on the Argus that morning, in expectation of which Frank had ordered an extra large edition to be printed, all of which was exhausted by noon.

Everybody was talking about the fire at the Neptune House and the murderous attempt upon the lives of the two newspaper men who boarded there.

Mr. Jebb and his friend Robinson had been brought out of their stupor by the vigorous efforts of the physician; and they were an astonished pair of individuals when they came to realize the part they had played in the affair.

"You both owe your lives to the pluck and cool-headedness of Frank Morris, the young editor of the Argus, who happened to be passing at the time the fire broke out. Since you seem to have no idea how you came to be in the condition in which you were found and rescued, it looks as if a great crime had been contemplated. Have you any enemy in town?"

They shook their heads in answer to the doctor's question.

Later on, when they read the Argus' account of the fire, and of the movements of the big, mysterious stranger seen by the boys descending from the window of their room, a strong suspicion as to the identity of this person occurred to each.

By this time Frank had interviewed the police department of Green River.

The town constables were notified to keep their eyes skinned for a big man in a shabby overcoat and soft felt hat.

This was rather a vague description of the suspect, but

it was the only clew they had to work on, for Morris did not consider it advisable to say that the big man resembled Squire Roach.

Early that afternoon Mr. Jebb and his friend Robinson, attired in borrowed garments, called at the office of the Argus and asked to see Frank Morris.

"He hasn't put in an appearance yet," said Jinks, who was in temporary charge of the establishment. "He and the foreman were up all night."

There was a big mail awaiting the young editor of the Argus when he arrived at the office at about four o'clock that afternoon.

The number of fifty-cent contributions coming in from all parts of the country from persons whose interest had been excited by the one hundred-dollar prize offered in connection with the story without a title—which had only been commenced the week before—was very encouraging.

Frank had employed a special assistant to attend to his subscription department, as well as to perform such other duties as the growing demands of the paper required.

The advertising columns of the Argus now showed that the young newspaper man had hustled to good advantage among the business firms of Green River.

There was all the difference in the world between the Argus of to-day and the Argus of three months ago, when Mr. Jebb was running things.

While Frank was going through his mail a visitor was announced, in the person of the dainty Miss Elsie Gray, who looked, if anything, prettier than ever in a new fall costume.

"Dear me, Frank Morris, you're up to your eyes in business, aren't you?" she said, taking a seat by the side of the editorial desk.

"I was up all night, and this is my first appearance at the office to-day; that's why all my work is ahead of me."

"Then I'm afraid I have no business here taking up your time," she said demurely.

"You are not disturbing me in the least, Miss Elsie. I possess the happy faculty of being able to work and talk at the same time."

"Really," she replied, with a bewitching smile, "you are one of the most wonderful boys I have ever met. It is quite an honor to be acquainted with you."

"I hope you are not quizzing me now, Miss Elsie," he said, smiling back at her.

"Oh, dear no; I wouldn't think of such a thing. Papa was speaking this morning of the remarkable improvement in the Argus since you took hold of it. He says it is altogether a different paper, fully as good as when your father was at his best."

"That is indeed a very great compliment," said Frank, much gratified. "And might I ask your opinion, Miss Elsie? Your father is perhaps prejudiced in my favor on account of political benefits received from my father. Now, your judgment ought to be disinterested."

"I shouldn't like to express my opinion, lest it make you conceited."

"Oh, come now, Miss Elsie," expostulated Frank.

"That's right," she answered, flashing a half-mischievous, half-defiant glance at him. "Do you know what brought me here to-day?"

"I didn't know but what you came to see me," hazarded Frank.

"Did you, indeed?" she replied, coquettishly. "I came to enter my name on your subscription list for a three months' trial term," and she extracted a silver half dollar from her purse and tendered it to him. "I mean to try and win that one hundred-dollar prize."

"But, Miss Elsie, your father being a regular subscriber entitles any member of his family to compete in the contest."

"I think I should prefer to have you accept my personal subscription," she said, in a way which induced him to accept her money; and he pushed a blank toward her for her signature.

"Are those all new subscriptions?" she asked, pointing to a pile of letters, many of which she had seen him open and take therefrom stamps, a few coins and some money orders.

"Yes."

"Where do they all come from? Surely not from this neighborhood?"

"From all over the United States."

Elsie expressed her astonishment, and Frank told her how he had advertised his prize offer in several of the largest circulated monthlies, and that these letters represented some of the results.

The girl was very much impressed by his business sagacity, and, as a matter of course, he rose several degrees in her estimation.

"I shall be at home Sunday night," she said, as she rose to go, "and I shall be pleased to have you call."

"It will give me great pleasure to accept your invitation," he answered, with a glow of pleasure.

She held her daintily gloved hand out to him as they parted at the outer door, and the gentle pressure of her fingers thrilled him as it had never done before.

Certainly Frank Morris thought a great deal of Elsie Gray.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN WHICH IT IS TO BE HOPED EVERYTHING IS SETTLED TO THE READER'S SATISFACTION.

The day following the Neptune House fire Mr. Jebb and his friend Robinson called again at the Argus office.

This time they found Frank in, and they hastened to express their gratitude for the service he had rendered them on the previous morning.

"Don't mention it," replied the boy; "I didn't do any more for you than I should have done for any one placed in a similarly unfortunate position."

"After this I trust there may be no hard feelings between us on account of old scores," said Mr. Jebb, rising to go.

"It is not my nature to hold a grudge against any man," said Frank, generously. "But of course you can hardly expect me to forget how you treated the confidence both

my father and mother reposed in you when you were entrusted with the control of the Argus."

"I admit the delinquency of my conduct and ask your forgiveness," said the Chicago journalist. "What I did, I blush to admit, I did for money. I see the error of my ways, which I believe has acted as a sort of boomerang. I have strong suspicions that the party who incited me to it is responsible for the Neptune House fire and all connected therewith."

"You can't mean Squire——" began Frank, horrified at the idea, which chimed in with Dan Harwood's belief, privately expressed to him.

"No matter who I mean," said Mr. Jebb, grimly. "If I can bring the truth home to him a very respectable member of the community will do time at the public's expense. I believe we're agreed on that—are we not, Robinson?"

"Well, I should warble," replied the irrepressible reporter.

"It is quite possible you may see us again before we leave this burg for our old stamping-grounds," continued Mr. Jebb; "in which event we may furnish you with a story for your columns which will startle Green River."

With these words Mr. Jebb and his friend Robinson took their departure.

It was about this time that Duncan Roach left Green River to attend the University of Michigan.

We are sorry to have to say that he went away without having thanked Frank Morris for his noble action in saving his life the night the Benson house was destroyed.

Frank finished the bolt and lock catalogue on time, and the job was pronounced by the manager of the manufactory to be fully up to the Chicago standard.

He was a proud boy when he received the company's check for the work, and passed it over to his mother for endorsement, so he could deposit it to her account in the Green River bank.

He made a profit of \$410 on the job.

And the business of the job-printing plant attached to the Argus was increasing steadily week by week, in spite of the lower competitive prices advertised by Bentley of the Times.

This was due not only to the high class of work Frank turned out—made possible by skilled workmen and by the introduction of the most popular faces of job letter in general use in the West—but by his genial manners as a canvasser for the trade of his townspeople, who one and all admired the boy's grit and perseverance and felt disposed to encourage him with their patronage.

Had the Times man used ordinary business judgment he could have saved a large part of the trade which drifted to the Argus office.

Most people don't care to change, all things being equal.

But Bentley's methods, never the best at any stage of his career, grew steadily more slipshod under Billings, who was an indifferent workman, and his lack of mechanical knowledge was reflected in the work he turned out for his boss.

Billings, however, possessed a great gift of gab, and he made Bentley believe he was the whole thing.

Walt Edwards had become a good friend of Frank Morris, and his example was followed by Eddie Hicks, Peter Winch, Spencer Lickett, and others of their set, so that the young editor was gradually getting introduced into the best society of Green River.

Judge Smith had practically taken him up, to use the expression, and this added greatly to the young fellow's importance in the community.

Whatever influence the Argus had lost under Mr. Jebb it had fully recovered by Frank's clear and undeviating course of action from the day he first shaped its policy in conformity with his father's views.

The Argus now had the entire confidence of the Republican County Committee, and Frank's trenchant pen was expected to do much toward leading the party to victory at the forthcoming local elections in November.

Three-quarters of the people of the community were now taking the Argus—probably half of the number being directly interested in the outcome of the young editor's serial story without a title, the plot of which and the incidents thereof he was handling with such skill as to attract the notice of many out-of-town newspaper editors, thereby bringing him favorable criticisms, which he reprinted in the Argus.

He had long since exhausted his supply of specimen copies, and was compelled to reset the first chapters of the story and print off several thousand copies of the same to fill the demands made upon him by the later subscribers, who continued to come in at the average of one hundred a day.

The success of the scheme was largely beyond his most sanguine expectations.

So much so, indeed, that he was induced to make the announcement of two additional prizes of fifty and twenty-five dollars for the second and third best titles, a booby prize of ten dollars for the worst title, as well as ten consolation prizes of five dollars each, to be awarded to ten titles to be selected blindfolded from the entire bunch of names sent in after the regular prizewinners had been selected.

Harwood had improved upon his popular local paragraphs by originating a half column of bright and witty creations under the heading of "Dan Harwood's Own," which appeared regularly, and were copied by many of the big dailies throughout the country.

About three o'clock one afternoon, exactly a week from the date of the Neptune House fire, while Frank was writing an editorial for the ensuing day's paper, Dan Harwood, who had been out collecting local items to be written up later in his own versatile style, rushed into the editorial sanctum and blurted out:

"You'll never guess what news I've brought."

"What is it?" asked the young editor, sitting back in his chair and regarding his assistant with much interest, for he appeared to be greatly excited.

"Squire Roach is dead."

"No!" exclaimed Morris, swinging around and facing Dan, for this news was a startler.

"Dropped dead in the bank an hour ago in the midst of an interview with Mr. Jebb and his friend Robinson."

"Well, this is sudden! What's the cause—apoplexy?"

"Heart failure, the physician called it, induced by some intense emotion or excitement. The cashier, Mr. Winch, said that the interview between the squire and his visitors was particularly stormy. I don't think it would be hard for you and I to surmise what took place at that interview."

Frank always found it necessary to work late on the evening before publication day.

That night when he returned to the office after supper he found a package on his desk which Wiggles, the boy, said had been left by a messenger from the Neptune House.

Frank opened the package and found a bunch of copy in Mr. Jebb's handwriting.

The boy read it over carefully down to the end of the last page, to which was attached an affidavit, signed and sworn to by Amos Jebb and Ajax Robinson, attesting the truth of the foregoing.

A brief note accompanied the manuscript, which read as follows:

"Here's where you get back at the man who hired me to 'do' the Argus. To-day we accidentally found the enclosed watch seal, bearing the squire's initials, and which any acquaintance of that gentleman's will immediately recognize, under the window of the burned room where the attempt was made on my life and Mr. Robinson's. With this in our possession we interviewed Squire Roach, with results not according to our expectations. We brought the crime home to him and—he collapsed. You are authorized to make whatever use of our sworn statement you see fit. You now hold the dead man's reputation in your hands. Good-by, Frank Morris. Robinson and myself are off for Chicago.

AMOS JEBB."

Just then Dan came in, and Frank handed him Mr. Jebb's manuscript without a word.

Harwood read it over from beginning to end, also the letter.

"Well," he said, "what are you going to do with it? You won't publish it, surely?"

"Publish that?" said the boy, looking Dan square in the eye. "I'm not built that way. The squire is dead—let him rest in peace. No act of mine shall bring disgrace to his memory. Put the whole thing, affidavit and all, in the composing-room stove."

Two months later the final instalment of Frank Morris' novelette without a title appeared in the Argus with the successful name attached.

The first prize was won by a young woman in St. Louis, the second by another woman of Oakland, Cal., and the third by a New Yorker.

The booby prize was drawn by Peter Winch, of Green River, to the great amusement of that young gentleman's friends.

Frank, in figuring up financial results, found that he

had received about five thousand dollars in trial subscriptions, and as much more from increased advertising patronage directly and indirectly traceable to his inflated circulation.

The scheme also proved of permanent value to him, for he was able to hold the several thousand Green River subscribers after the story was finished, and most of them thereafter renewed their patronage from year to year.

The local elections, which took place early in November, boosted the Republicans of Green River into power again, and after the first of the ensuing year the young editor received his reward for his unswerving support of the party, when the Argus was made the official organ of the county in place of the Times.

On Christmas morning Frank was treated to a surprise—he found a bill of sale of the Argus establishment, made out to himself, and signed by his mother, in his stocking, which she had persuaded him to hang to the mantel as in days of old.

He found something else, too, in his stocking, which almost pleased him as much—whatever it was, it bore the compliments of the season from Elsie Gray.

Frank figured up the profits of his job-printing branch on the first of the year, and found it had cleared a profit of about fifteen hundred dollars since he took hold of it.

With increased facilities, new type and machinery, the boy expected to clear five thousand dollars during the coming year, without considering the profits of the Argus, which would undoubtedly be large, as he had many other schemes to boom it to a higher plane.

Frank paid off the mortgage on the cottage when it became due, so that now his mother owned it free and clear.

Duncan Roach came home from college to spend the Christmas holidays; but his disposition was the same as ever, and he found, greatly to his disgust, that Frank Morris had supplanted him in the good graces of his own particular set, of which Walt Edwards and Eddie Hicks were the leaders.

It is noticed that Frank finds occasion to visit the Gray farm very often, from which fact the wise ones argue that it won't be so very long before Elsie Gray will take up her permanent abode at the Morris cottage as Frank's wife.

THE END.

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" 6.—Building a Railroad; or, The Young Contractors of Lakeview	- - - -	" " 10th
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